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DEC 2024/JAN 2025

THE 2024 MEN OF THE YEAR ISSUE

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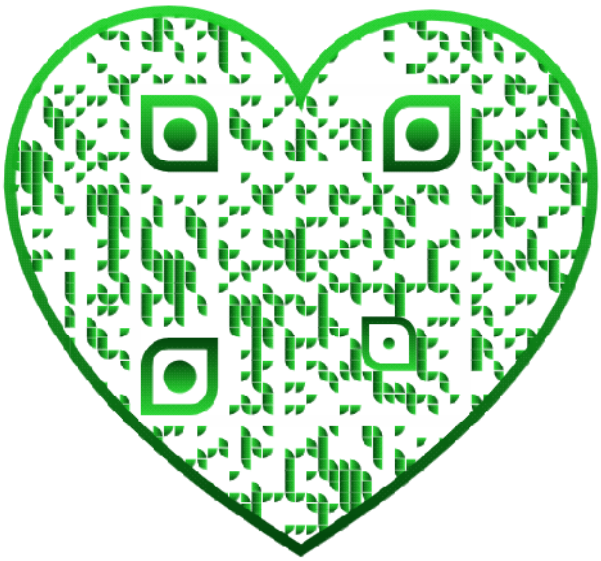

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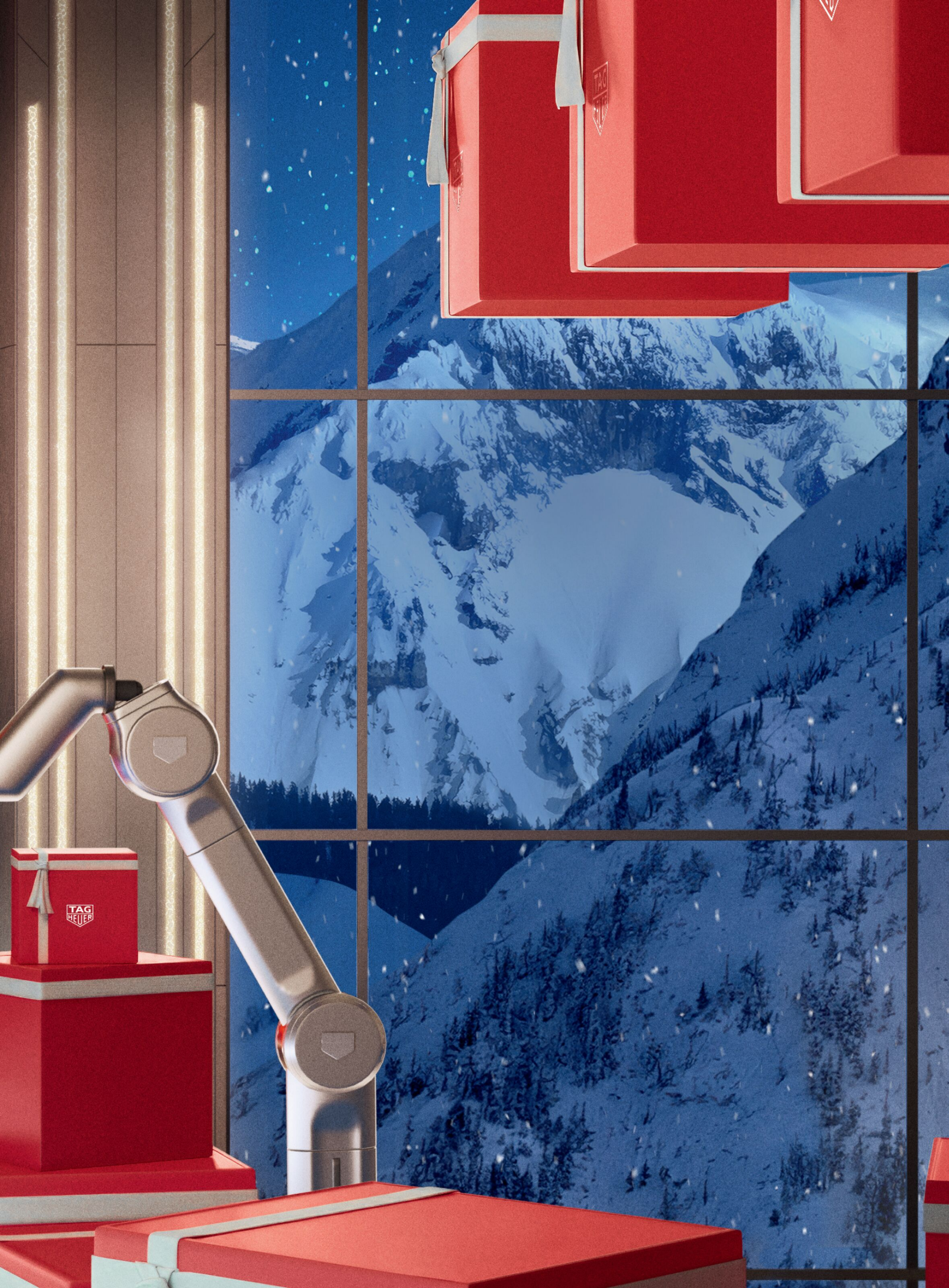
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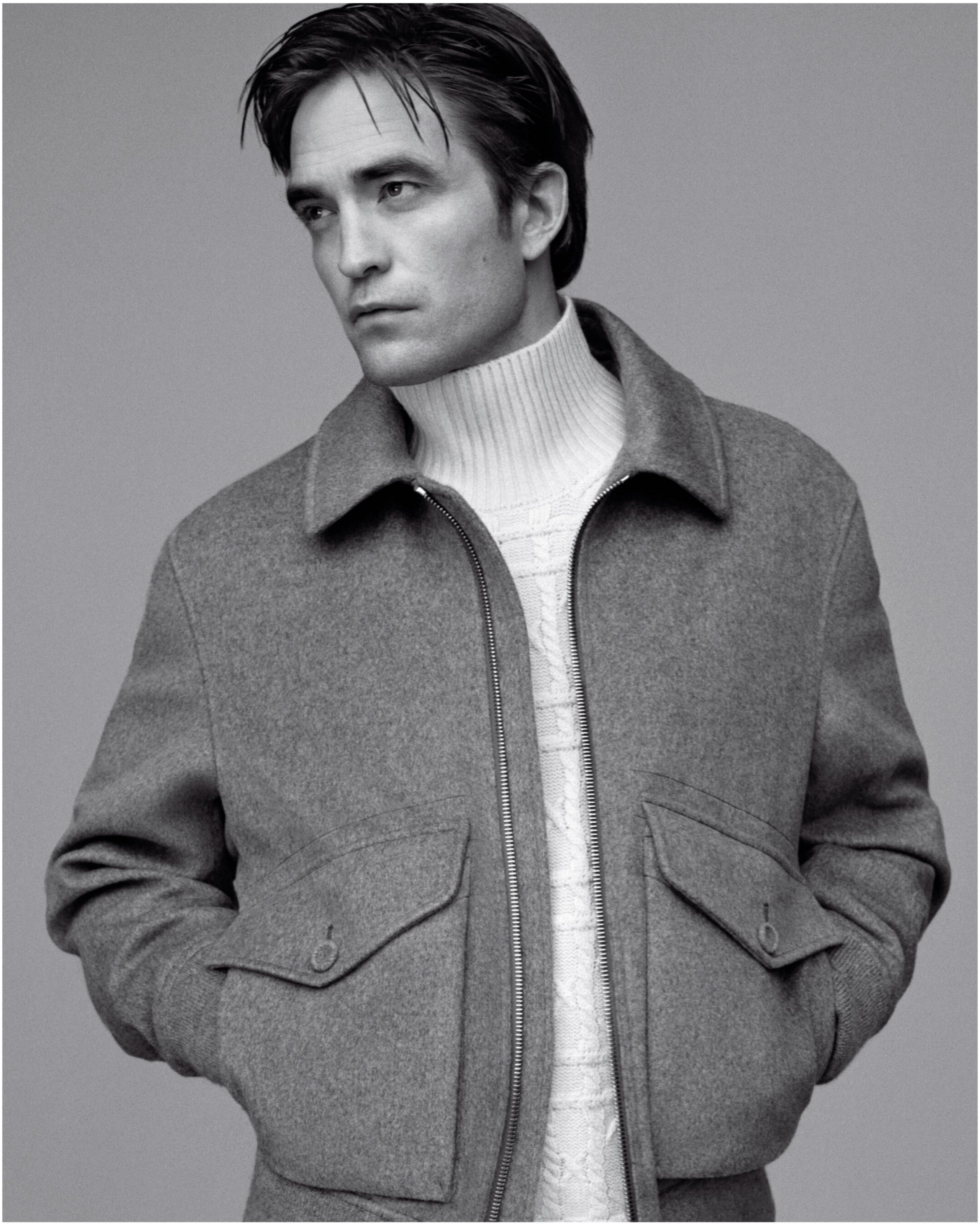

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On the Covers

Jude Law wears jacket, jumper and trousers by **Bottega Veneta.**

Photographed by Paola Kudacki. Styled by Angelo Mitakos.

Central Cee wears jacket and trousers by **Louis Vuitton,** vest by **Zara,** underwear by **Mains**, watch by **G-Shock.**

Photographed by William Arcand. Styled by Angelo Mitakos.

Nicole Kidman wears dress and boots by **Balenciaga.**

Photographed by Felix Cooper. Styled by Katie Grand.

Kobbie Mainoo wears vest by **Ami** and suit by **Burberry. Cole Palmer** wears jumper by **Stefan Cooke x Solid Homme** and suit by **Burberry.**

Photographed by Dan Martensen. Styled by Martin Metcalf.

GQ HQ

Behind the Scenes With the People Who Make GQ

WILLIAM ARCAND
Photographer

William Arcand is a French-Canadian photographer and director based in London. For this MOTY issue, he shot Central Cee. "His calm, nonchalant energy fitted seamlessly with the moody ambience we created. Cench wanted jazz on set, a surprisingly perfect soundtrack."

ROBERT KAZANDJIAN
Writer

Robert Kazandjian started writing about music by interviewing grime MCs while still at school. He interviewed Central Cee for our MOTY issue. "The challenging part was writing about an artist *GQ* readers will know, but who hails from a scene they may not."

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STYLING, ANGELO MITAKOS.

For our story on Jude Law, see page 130.

Suit by **Dolce & Gabbana.** Top by **Anderson & Sheppard.**
Watch by **Cartier.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY **PAOLA KUDACKI**

Based on C.P. Company’s dyeing expertise, FW024 introduces Bi-Film, an innovative garment dyed fabric featuring a double polyurethane coating on stretch warp knitted nylon.

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As the Official Style Fashionwear Partner of Manchester City, C.P. Company deepens its bond with football through the FW024 campaign. The spotlight shines on three players: Jérémy Doku in the Shetland Twill Mille Jacket, Nathan Aké in the Gore G-Type Reversible Jacket, and Phil Foden in the Bi-Film Fisherman Jacket.

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GQ MEN OF THE YEAR

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH JO MALONE LONDON

For our story on Nicole Kidman, see page 158.

Vest and skirt by **Ned Sims.** Coat, from Katie Grand's personal archive, by **Balenciaga.**

STYLING, KATIE GRAND.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **FELIX COOPER**

GQ MEN OF THE YEAR

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH JO MALONE LONDON

For our story on Central Cee, see page 144.

Vest by **Zara.** Trousers by **Burberry.** Trainers and socks by **Nike.** Sunglasses by **Gentle Monster.** Chain, his own.

STYLING, ANGELO MITAKOS.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **WILLIAM ARCAND**

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Once More, With Feeling

WELCOME BACK TO *GQ*'S MEN OF THE YEAR ISSUE.
This is our annual moment to celebrate the most compelling, complicated and talented people who shape film, fashion, theatre, sport, art and everything else that makes up the beautiful and mighty colossus that is culture.

It is a busy time of year. At once, we're making the magazine you hold in your hands and planning our legendary Men of the Year red carpet and party – I thank Jo Malone London and Defender for believing in what we build. By early September, I lock into a flow state where days blend into a repetitive rhythm: march to the coffee truck in the park, bound onto the Tube, edit, approve, meet, review, back on the Tube, go to the gym if I'm lucky, eat, sleep. Last Tuesday, everything got so samey that I forgot it was Thursday. Every now and then, you've gotta touch grass.

Thankfully there are moments that break the dutiful monotony, like when Nicole Kidman arrived at a studio in North London a few weeks ago – statuesque, jetlagged, underslept, magnificent. For the past few years, a new and nuanced collection of internet stars have been emerging en masse from rarely seen corners of culture… dancers and commentators and bloggers and so on. A new breed of fame has crystallised. But it is still quite a shock to see a real, live Movie Star. They have something different (Gen Z call it "aura"). That day of her *GQ* cover shoot, working with the stylist Katie Grand, Kidman entered a kind of wonderful autopilot – I'd love to say that she was carefully and artfully directed and posed, but in truth, that shoot was just her. It was muscle memory, like Messi streaking forward on a counterattack, Williams serving to close out a Grand Slam. Mastery.

One of the many revelations in Kidman's cover interview is how rumination, doubt and reflection still arrive, even after one architects a body of work like hers; how often she pauses, recalibrates, snaps herself out of it. We are all aligned, right, that Kidman could continue making cinematic limited television series about small-town murders until the sun burns out, advancing her career ad infinitum. So the fact that she chose, at 57 years old, to make a film as complex as *Babygirl* – which explores, among other things, female power, sexual shame and self-love – speaks wonders about the impact of awakening out of a haze, tilting your face up for air after many strokes underwater.

A hill that I will die on is that life is just many days like today. Whether you take that as a good thing or a bad thing is on you. I think that there is no "sudden" in life, only a sculpture carved little by little. Put another way: nothing changes until something is changed.

What I love most about the stories in this Men of the Year issue is how they unmask how rightfully complicated and deliberated success actually is. It's right there in Kidman's profile. Jude Law's, too. It is Central Cee staring out of the window of the 94 bus near Shepherd's Bush, it is Haider Ackermann contemplating in an airy design studio in Paris. It is with extreme pleasure that we report that greatness is not an arrival. It is a becoming.

Adam Baidawi
DEPUTY GLOBAL EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

PHOTOGRAPH, KRISTA SCHLUETER.

GQ MEN OF THE YEAR

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GQ World

Drops

The most informed minds in the *GQ* universe drop their wish list for a season of endless party, optimal chill and enormous fits.

39 Gifts to Ring in a Whole New Year

PHOTOGRAPH BY **LULU McARDLE**
STYLED BY **ITUNU OKE**

Shirt, £3,555, and tie, £365, by **Ferragamo.** Gloves, £460, by **Gucci.** Brooch, £59,000, by **Van Cleef.**

ICONIC IS

KARL LAGERFELD

MADRE ESPADÍN Y CUISHE MEZCAL
As the DJ and musician at the heart of New York's indie-sleaze revival, **The Dare** picks up a bottle of this sweet and smoky mezcal whenever he's in need of a last-minute present. "Literally can't lose with this gift," he says. (£28 for 200 ml)

ROBERTS RADIO ALARM CLOCK
British *GQ* culture contributor **Jack King** has been hunting for "a stylish excuse to stop using my phone alarm, which means less impulse to doomscroll at 1am." And with this retro-cool alarm clock-cum-radio, the search is over. (£129)

MOSCHINO "TIE ME" SUEDE BAG
While British *GQ* fashion assistant **Bea Bosley** does think that "function is the most important trait of a luxury bag", she always has room for a good caveat, namely: "unless the un-functional detail is as fun as having the world's longest belt wrapped around its middle." (£1,700)

OMEGA SPEEDMASTER MOONWATCH PROFESSIONAL
"I have limited fascination with – or desire to go to – the moon," says British *GQ* lifestyle director **Michael Christensen**. "But that doesn't stop me from developing a sizeable crush on this Omega Speedmaster Moonwatch. It's the two-tone that's got me. Got me good." (£17,100)

JO MALONE LONDON HINOKI & CEDARWOOD COLOGNE INTENSE
What's a shared scent between friends? British *GQ* senior style editor **Murray Clark** wants to know. "I'm pretty stingy with praise. So when I said to a mate recently, 'You smell amazing,' I meant it – and he was gassed that I then copied his fragrance, which feels like you're bubbling away in a hot spring." (£160)

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD FELT BERET
For British *GQ* senior commerce writer **Heidi Quill**, this Vivienne Westwood beret makes a strong case for itself. "An orb, an embroidered statement and a scarlet red colour, wrapped up in the drama of a beret? Where do I sign?" (£155)

PALACE X THE GREAT FROG RING
"Every guy needs a nice statement ring that he can wear daily," says British *GQ* style contributor **Adam Cheung**. "And this ring, from a collab between Palace and London jewellers The Great Frog, is weighty and robust, which looks – and feels – expensive." (£925)

ALLIGATOR JESUS DIAMOND GRILLZ
"Diamonds are a girl's best friend," South African pop star **Tyla** reminds us. Especially when they're splashed across a righteous set of custom grills. (£28,820)

LACOSTE SWEATER
The duality of knitwear (and the sanctity of its coupling) is front of mind this winter for British *GQ* culture writer **Josiah Gogarty**. "This logo-fied Lacoste jumper looks like the lovechild of prep and streetwear. Which, to be clear, is a very good thing." (£530)

BAMFORD BGD SPORT ARNICA BALM
Is a life as a "flannel-wearing, lumbersexual-blaring Noah Kahan" a prerequisite for this delightful and good-looking balm? Thankfully not, according to British *GQ* associate editor **Olivia Ovenden**. "I've never split logs in Wisconsin, but my aching limbs are still extremely grateful for this after a long day of using my tools (typing on a computer)." (£29)

TYLA: ALVARO BEAMUD CORTES/COURTESY OF EPIC RECORDS. THE DARE: RICHARD KERN/COURTESY OF THE DARE.

WORDS BY **MAHALIA CHANG** AND **YANG-YI GOH**

GQ World Drops

FENDI PEEKABOO SOFT BAG
Between the left-open top that gives it its name, the wild stitching and that sweet little Fendi clasp, the Peekaboo is a no-brainer for British *GQ* style editor **Mahalia Chang**. Well, almost. "The only question now is, which colour do I want most?" (£4,000)

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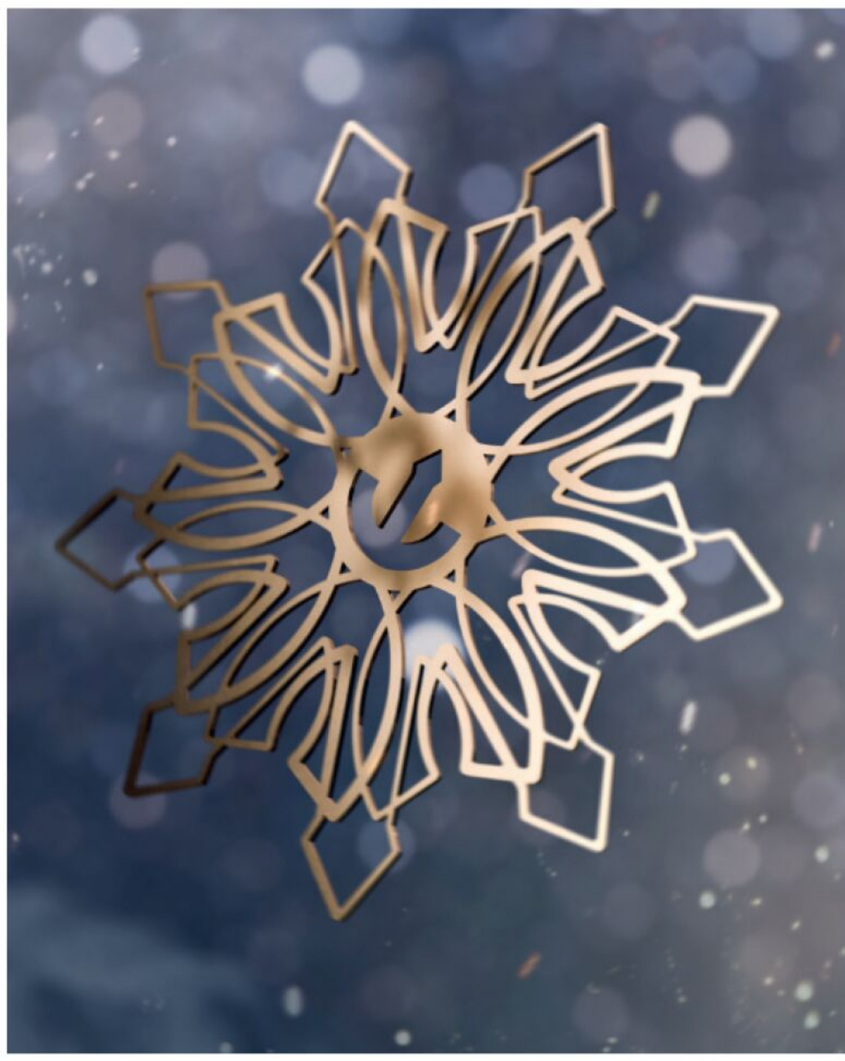

Feel it !

CAPTAIN COOK HIGH-TECH CERAMIC SKELETON

MR MARVIS

MR MARVIS' Autumn/Winter 2024 collection has arrived, with the perfect trousers, shirts and pullovers for the colder months. This season, we're introducing new trousers, including the coloured denim Five-pockets and The Heavy Classics, as well as many new knitwear styles and sophisticated outerwear designs. Discover the full collection now on **mrmarvis.co.uk**

GQ World Drops

SAINT LAURENT TUXEDO
"Buy me Anthony Vaccarello's rippling riff on Saint Laurent's house-speciality tuxedo," says US *GQ* senior commerce editor **Avidan Grossman**, "and I promise to show up to your party – and pretend I'm excited to be there." Sounds like a deal to us. (Jacket, £2,645; trousers, £1,365)

VINTAGE CARTIER TANK WATCH
Thom Browne is the king of uniform dressing and, as far as he's concerned, his trademark grey suits only feel complete "with a simple vintage Cartier watch". (£9,800)

THE ROW BRUNO JUMPER
"This is the cosy sweater of the season," declares **Anthony O'Baner Jr**, *GQ* executive assistant to the global editorial director, of this toasty cashmere layer. "Seriously, it's the only one I'm after." (£3,230)

TECHNOGYM MEDICINE BALL
"Mark me ready for the January gym return," says British *GQ* features editor **Oliver Franklin-Wallis**. "It's all about functional gains – and gear that wouldn't look out of place in a vintage Muhammad Ali pic." (£160)

COMMISSION MIDTOWN TOTE
US *GQ* visuals editor **Bowen Fernie** says this enormous, painterly leather tote is perfect "for people like me, who like to carry around a little too much stuff at all times". (£1,330)

RIMOWA ORIGINAL OPTICAL CABIN
Rimowa's hard-wearing luggage "will take you anywhere in style," says *GQ* global fashion director **Miles Pope** – especially this trippy new spin with its off-kilter aluminium ribbing. (£1,540)

BOTTEGA VENETA COLPO DI SOLE EAU DE PARFUM
The combination of French angelica oil and Moroccan orange blossom absolute might be the key to unlocking everything for British *GQ* style projects editor **Itunu Oke**: "If you smell good, you feel good – and if you feel good then you look good, right?" (£350)

STETSON EL PRESIDENTE COWBOY HAT
Country renegade **Orville Peck** knows his way around a good cowboy hat. Crafted from fine fur felt with a 10-carat gold buckle set, this stone-cold classic Stetson is his "all-time favourite." (£1,120)

VICTORINOX POCKET KNIFE
"2024 might have seen the slow death of gorpcore, but I'm not letting go just yet," says **Robin Key**, British *GQ* visuals director. "I keep fantasising about all the outdoorsy activities I could get up to with this gorgeous little pocket knife." (£129)

LOEWE TERRA VULCA LACE-UP SHOES IN SUEDE
GQ global design director **Keir Novesky** is generally more of a Converse guy, but, he says, "These lilac Loewe kicks might make me change my tune." (£595)

ORVILLE PECK: BEN PRINCE/COURTESY OF WARNER RECORDS. THOM BROWNE: BLAINE DAVIS/COURTESY OF THOM BROWNE.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **MITCH PAYNE** AND COURTESY OF BRANDS

GQ World

Drop

GUCCI GINGHAM JACKET
Why does US *GQ* fashion editor **Brandon Tan** love this jacket so much? "Casual and cool," he explains. "Need I say more?" (£1,900)

DAVID YURMAN SCULPTED CABLE FLEX BRACELET
If your fit is in need of a little extra oomph, **Leon Bridges** recommends this showstopping diamond bracelet. "It's simple, yet elevates any look," the Grammy-winner tells us. (£14,900)

PRADA TOTE
"I've been thinking about this weirdly simple (and simply weird) Prada bag since it first hit the runway in January," **Samuel Hine**, US *GQ* senior fashion writer, says of this smooth suede tote. (£5,200)

TAG HEUER CONNECTED CALIBRE E4 45 MM
On the golf course, **Kwame Onwuachi** – the award–winning chef behind New York's Tatiana restaurant – sports this handsome steel smartwatch for reasons both practical... and not. "It keeps track of your distances," he says, "but you can also digitally change the face to match your outfit." (£1,400)

MARTINE ROSE REVERSE SPORTS JACKET
"I'm just infatuated with Martine Rose," says **Offset**. This techy, sculptural jacket makes it easy to see why. "It keeps the streetwear feel to it, but it's also super luxury." (£1,200)

PHIPPS FLEECE JACKET
Joel Pavelski, *GQ* global director of content strategy, has a challenge for you. "Try to tell me you wouldn't be wearing this fleece every day of the Christmas season. You can't!" he says. (£665)

MARCATO ATLAS PASTA MAKER
There comes a point in every Christmas break where leftover turkey can no longer be tolerated. British *GQ* editorial associate **Rebecca Dolan** already has a reserve: "It's time to whip out a shiny new pasta machine and start rolling fat strips of fettuccine." (£95 at Selfridges)

GIORGIO ARMANI BY OAKLEY NEVE SNOW GOGGLES
The lens tech on these Armani x Oakley goggles make colours all the brighter in the snow, which is great when it works. And when it doesn't? "They're slick enough to make wiping out look chic," says **Ben Allen**, British *GQ* associate editor. (£315)

NEW BALANCE X MIU MIU 530 MULES
"I've never really been a fashion sneaker person," admits US *GQ* visuals director **Stephanie Tran**. "But a fashion sneaker *mule*? Size 5, please." (£820)

OFFSET: COURTESY OF MOTOWN RECORDS. LEON BRIDGES: JACK BOOL/COURTESY OF COLUMBIA RECORDS. KWAME ONWUACHI: STORM SANTOS/COURTESY OF KWAME ONWUACHI. ALL OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF THE BRANDS.

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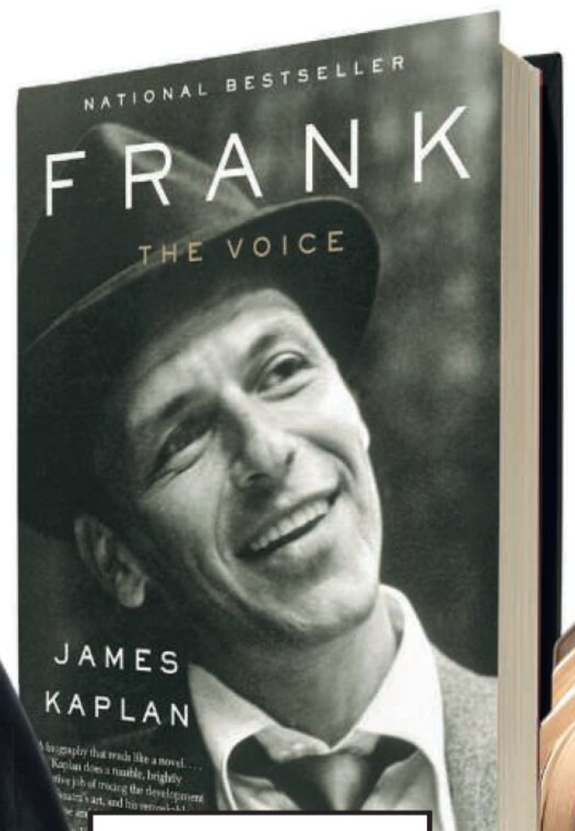
KENZO REVERSIBLE SHEARLING BLOUSON IN LAMBSKIN LEATHER
When the weather takes a turn for the worse this winter, *GQ* global video programming and strategy director **Leo Fernandez** will be sitting pretty in this bold and brawny bomber. "It's the kind of gift that makes you excited for colder days," he says, "just so you can show it off." (£2,710)



***FRANK: THE VOICE* AND *SINATRA: THE CHAIRMAN* BY JAMES KAPLAN**
Got a dad on your gift list who loves to read? **Jeff Goldblum** has just the thing. "I'm devouring every titbit in these comprehensively detailed volumes about Mr Sinatra," he says. "The cool, the brilliantly gifted, the volatile and complicated." (£20, and – not shown – £15)

BVLGARI OCTO FINISSIMO TOURBILLON
At a dainty 5mm, this is a slim watch with a big personality. For British *GQ* style and watches contributor **Ollie Cox**, that's the ball game. Plus: "The combo of blue and rose gold looks unreal." (Price upon request)

WALES BONNER HOWARD CONTRAST-TRIM SWEATSHIRT
"No one does academia like Wales Bonner," says **Heven Haile**, US *GQ* editorial operations assistant. On the evidence of this rakish Howard jumper, we'd tend to agree. (£450)

HERMÈS GULLIVER KELLY RETOURNÉ 35
Upon moving back to New York a few years ago, interior designer **Jeremiah Brent** started collecting iconic vintage bags to tote around town. "I don't think there's anything chicer than worn-in leather," he says. (£9,470)

DSQUARED2 DENIM BLAZER
According to *GQ* global research director **Mick Rouse**, a Canadian tuxedo still counts as a tuxedo. "If anyone tells you distressed denim can't be formal, just show them this jacket," he says. (£1,855)

BYREDO BIBLIOTHÈQUE CANDLE
When Off-White creative director **Ib Kamara** needs to relax, he lights up one of these sumptuous leather-scented candles. "They're the best thing for a quiet night in during the winter," he says. (£70)

APPLE IPHONE 16 PRO MAX
For **Ernesto Macias**, US *GQ* entertainment editor, having the latest iPhone isn't a want – it's a necessity. "My phone is literally an extension of my body," he says. "I'm constantly texting, calling, emailing, posting, liking, commenting and gossiping. If you get it, you get it." (£1,199)

MANOLO BLAHNIK CARLTON JEWELLED-BUCKLE LOAFERS
Can a (really) good pair of loafers break up the monotony of endless black-tie events? British *GQ* fashion editor **Angelo Mitakos** is willing to risk his fits to find out. "I'm always looking for ways to add something unique to my tux – I think these might be the answer." (£975)

IB KAMARA: COURTESY OF IB KAMARA. JEREMIAH BRENT: ADRIAN GAUT/COURTESY OF JEREMIAH BRENT. JEFF GOLDBLUM: PASCAL LE SEGRETAIN/GETTY IMAGES. *FRANK: THE VOICE*: VINTAGE BOOKS/COURTESY OF KNOPF. ALL OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF THE BRANDS.

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TV's Prince of Darkness

GQ World Drops

As *House of the Dragon*'s uber-creep Prince Aemond, Ewan Mitchell cemented himself as 2024's freakiest TV villain. By JACK KING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
LULU McARDLE
STYLED BY
ITUNU OKE

GQ World
Drops

OPENING PAGE
Jacket and belt, prices upon request, and trousers, £920, by **Versace.**
Brooch, price upon request, by **Van Cleef & Arpels.**
Sunglasses, £270, by **Gucci.**
Ring, price upon request, by **Boucheron.**

THIS PAGE
Shirt, £245, by **MSGM x Google Pixel.**
Trousers, £330, by **MSGM.**
Sunglasses, £275, by **Balenciaga.**

OPPOSITE, TOP
Shirt, £1,700, and trousers, £950, by **Dolce & Gabbana.**
Ring, price upon request, by **Boucheron.**
Shoes, stylist's own.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM
Blazer, £1,670, by **Moschino.**
Trousers, £1,335, by **Ami.**

HALFWAY THROUGH ITS sophomore season, *House of the Dragon* finally gave us what we've been waiting for: an all-out dragon brawl. In one corner, Ewan Mitchell's Prince Aemond, on the back of Vhagar, the baddest winged beast of them all. In the other, Rhaenys (a steely Eve Best) riding Meleys. Then, out of nowhere… *bah gawd*, is that King Aegon's music?

And so erupted the most explosive, expensive scene of an otherwise slow-burning season, which saw Aemond consolidate his power over Westeros and Mitchell ascend to the heights of villainy as *HOTD*'s dark, sparsely beating heart. "What I love about that sequence is that it's this unlayering of surprises," says Mitchell. "Aemond is just picking his moment, and above Rook's Rest, he seizes it."

Mitchell kows how to play a creep. The 27-year-old actor, who also played Michael Gavey – another skin-crawling weirdo – in 2023's *Saltburn*, is a film buff, and sees Aemond as similar to the murderous villains in slashers like *Halloween*. "No matter how much Jamie Lee Curtis' [character] tries to wind through the trees to escape Michael Myers, [he always] catches up with her," he says. "The idea that this guy is your maker, and you will meet him eventually."

What makes Aemond so compelling is his physicality: the pale, strikingly angular face; his missing eye, replaced by a scar; the thin lips that so often curl into a Grinch-like grin. Aemond drifts around the draughty halls and bedchambers of the Red Keep like the smell of a rotting wound. "He almost floats into scenes. He's almost an idea rather than a person," says Mitchell. "The way he looks, he screams 'villain'."

Having been bullied relentlessly by his cousins and his brother Aegon as a child in season one, Aemond spends the second season reshaping himself as a ruthless, amoral war leader who will do anything to see his side succeed. "I think that's what's so good about George RR Martin's works. His characters are never black and white – they're grey," says Mitchell.

So, did Aemond actually try to kill his brother? (Aegon, played by Tom Glynn-Carney, is – spoiler – left disfigured but alive.) "I think it was a mixture of both things," Mitchell explains. "It was inevitable that he was going to blast Rhaenys… but his brother being there, that wasn't part of the plan. So he was in the way, but then also, there's a little glimmer in Aemond's eye."

While much of the cast filmed on location in Surrey's Bourne Wood, Mitchell says, the majority of his scenes for the dragon battle were shot on green screens. They also used the Volume, an enormous wall of LED screens – also used for shows like *The Mandalorian* and *Fallout* – that

"Aemond is almost an idea rather than a person. The way he looks, he screams 'villain'."

GQ World Drops

project photorealistic backgrounds in lieu of green screen. Mitchell's one day of on-site shooting involved being hoisted "a good 40ft" above the treeline on one of the "bucking broncos" that are the mechanised real-life stand-ins for dragons. Each "dragon" is programmed to jut and move differently. Fortunately, Mitchell loves heights.

Mitchell stays "in the state of character" of Aemond while filming. "He does possess that darkness, and it's my job to embrace that a little bit," he reflects. But, living in Derby, he can leave it all at the set door once filming's over. "He's definitely not a mind I'd want to stay in for a very long period of time."

I ask him whether he considers this to be "method", the divisive, relentlessly committed acting style (in)famously deployed by Daniel Day-Lewis, Jeremy Strong and Joaquin Phoenix, among many others. "It's a good question. It's like, if I was to go method for Aemond, does that mean I'd have to carve my eye out? I don't know! Or is it just about staying in the mindset?" he says. "I don't think it's *method*, but it's my method."

Working on a prestige show like *House of the Dragon*, watched by millions every week, opens an actor up to a different scale of praise – and indeed criticism, as in the case of *Game of Thrones*. (*HOTD*'s second season was warmly reviewed, but fans were divided over its subdued finale.) How conscious is he of the audience's response? "I'm not on social media, so the fan interaction I have is often through fanmail. The letters that I receive are often beautifully articulated, and often badass. I use that as motivation," he says. "I never take that for granted."

And his reviews? "I read some reviews online... I kind of keep my blinkers on, keep my mind on the job at hand," he says. "But I love all the [reactions], whether bad or good."

Season three of *HOTD* – book spoilers aside – will likely see Aemond going even further down the path to darkness. "I haven't had the scripts yet," says Mitchell. "I definitely think it's going to be interesting." That doesn't mean that there isn't light among the shade. "Maybe Aemond wants the people of King's Landing to think he's a monster," Mitchell says, but "secretly, deep down, he needs that affection from his mum. He just needs to be loved."

JACK KING *is a regular contributor to* BRITISH GQ.

Top, price upon request, by **Ludovic de Saint Sernin.** Trousers, price upon request, by **Tom Ford.** Bangle, £3,995, by **886 by the Royal Mint.**

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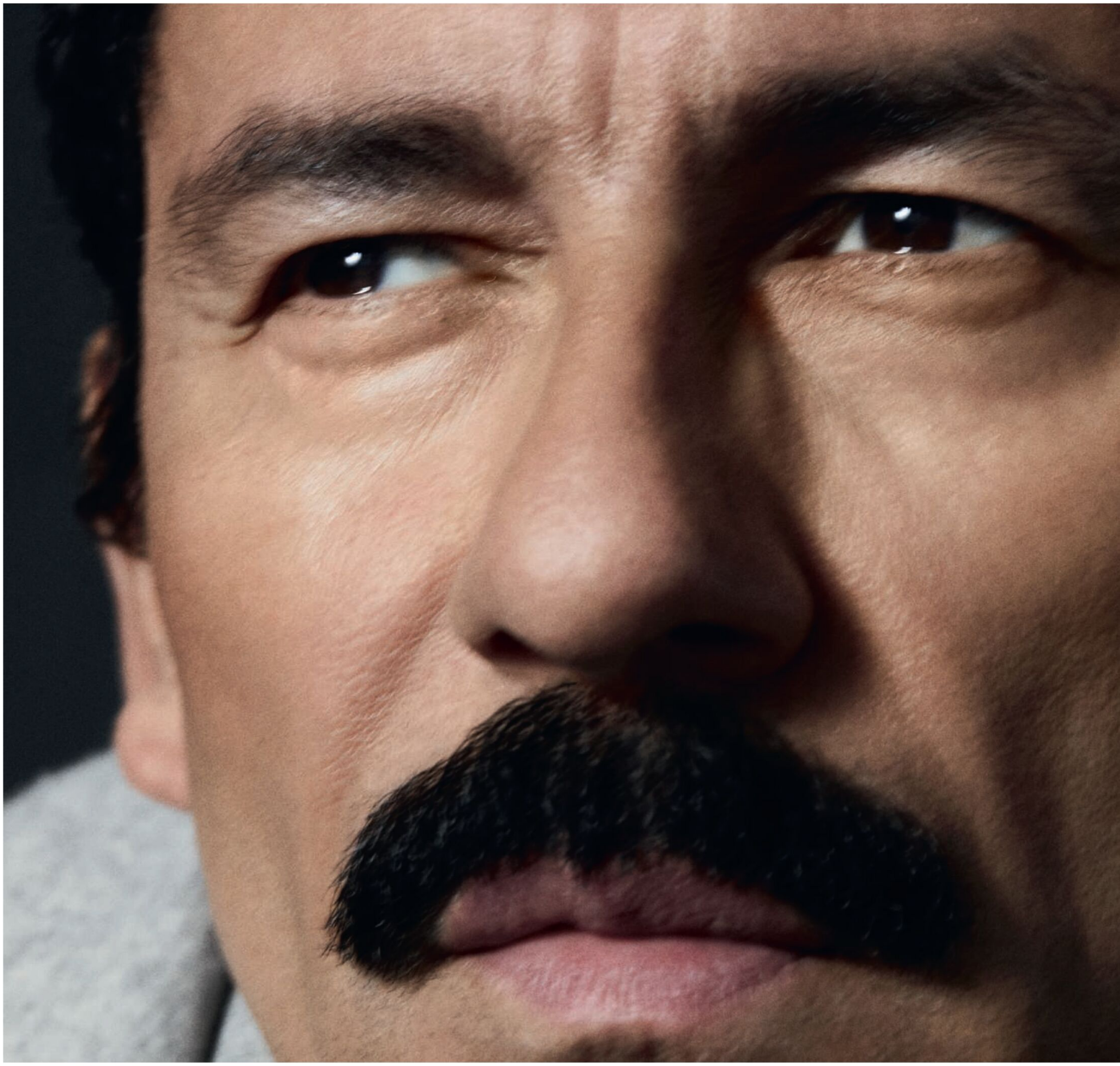
RESORTS

GQ World Fashion

In Haider We Hope

The role of a fashion designer is one usually forged in chaos and fired down by “creative differences”. But on the eve of a new Tom Ford directorship, Haider Ackermann has never felt more free. By MURRAY CLARK

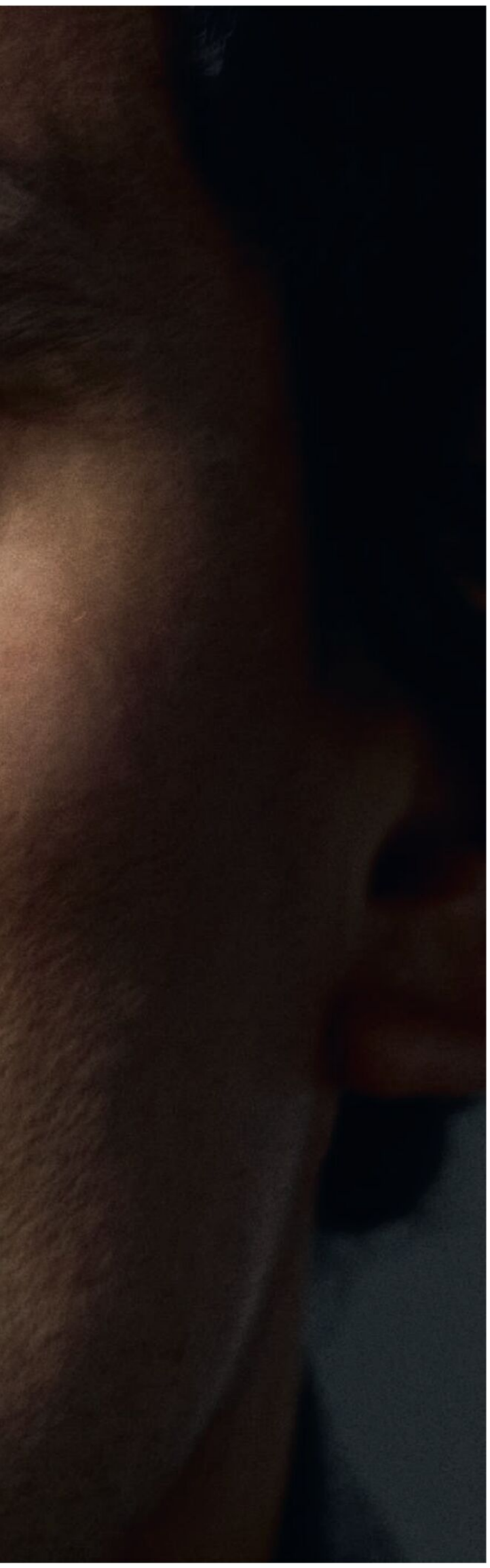
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **SØLVE SUNDSBØ**



In the 19th century, leading American spiritualists were into the idea of Summerland: an afterlife that was a personalised heaven of sorts. It could be a little house on the prairie; a rococo mansion; one long glade filled with butterflies and lambs and other nice things. But a Haussmannian atelier two storeys above Paris's Place de Madeleine feels pretty close to a universal paradise. Cloud-white walls reach up high, buffered from the ceiling by a fine cornice horizon. Three huge mirrors surround an angular wooden bench. There's a distant tinkling of a piano's ivories from somewhere. It's almost comically tranquil (or comically French, I can't decide). And in this sanctuary sits the designer Haider Ackermann. He likes it here too.

"I love living in Paris," he says, rolling his eyes and grinning. "For God's sake, I am French. In Paris you can disappear; I don't have that sense in other cities. You always meet people, bump into people. But here? That doesn't happen at all." He looks out of the window, pausing for a moment to admire the crisp September sunlight like a very happy cat. "I love to bike around early in the morning at 6am and discover new streets and new angles and new corners. It's amazing."

Paris, with its hellish traffic, doesn't seem like the most obvious place of



monastic peace. But for someone like Ackermann, to go incognito is a gift. The fashion designer has a name that commands almost universal respect in an industry prone to mob mentality – *grab your digital pitchforks, brothers, a creative director has choked*. Not so with Ackermann. Everyone seems to like him. Even the mean ones in the fashion press corps like him. But more importantly, everyone is excited by him – now more than ever. After taking the reins of Canada Goose in May, he's just been officially appointed the successor to the Tom Ford throne.

"I've been... working," Ackermann says, not-so-fresh from a New-York-to-Paris red eye. Still, despite the lack of sleep, his face cracks into a wry, barely there smile. He cuts a warm figure that belies a Google Image search, which nets a collection of serious greyscale portraits. He is blessed with cherubic black curls and impressive angles. He smiles a lot. He leans in conspiratorially. Ackermann moves my espresso towards me, an open palm silently gesturing for me to enjoy: "Yes, quite busy lately."

The Tom Ford announcement generated the same amount of noise as a major Premier League signing – and the same level of media fervour. "A perfect match for a sexy brand?" asked *The New York Times*. "He will knock the ball out of the park, this is an appointment you can feel excited about," wrote one user on fashion-nerd subreddit r/whatthefrockk. Over on YouTube, style pundit Fashion Roadman quickly dropped a video titled "Will Haider Ackermann Transform Tom Ford's Legacy?" It's a huge engagement, and a move to such a deep-pocketed company requires one to do the rounds with the stakeholders, the shareholders and the holdovers. (Estée Lauder acquired Tom Ford for £2.15 billion in 2022.) That is a job in itself. But Ackermann has always been busy building and nurturing his own plot in fashion's landscape. His patch is colourful, fertile and regal. His work – for Berluti, on red carpets, at a watershed 2010 Florence menswear debut – manages to dazzle without ever tiptoeing into the gauche. And while that translates well to deeply exquisite runway shows, it has worked at Canada Goose, too. For an out-and-out outdoors brand, Ackermann's turn was always going to riff on some idea of gorpcore. That's a tough gig when so many critics prophesied the trend's doom. But where a slew of outdoor-tech brands oscillate between apocalypse chic and "aw, shucks" comfort, Ackermann's version is closer to a utopian elegance. The temperature of the future may be at freezing, but his sculptural, billowing parkas could settle the Arctic in pops of emerald green, rose pink and electric blue. The expeditionary hats are sharp, almost aerodynamic, and skew closer to Stetsons. In Ackermann's winter palace, all is well – and acutely tasteful. "It's not a question of reinvention. I don't think that's the purpose I have. It's just to put a little bit of electricity in there," he says. "The Canada Goose archives have the most fluorescent colours: pink, orange, yellow, all back in the days of 1957. Now you can go into the shop, and it's muted colours – navy blue, black – so I try to embrace that older part."

"Many luxury houses don't feel luxury for me. They don't make me dream like they used to."

Left and previous page: Haider Ackermann. *Below*: his debut collection for Canada Goose.

He's been drawn to vibrancy since his childhood, which was pretty unconventional. "I grew up in Africa. Ethiopia, Chad and Nigeria," says Ackermann, the Colombian-born adopted son of an Alsatian cartographer. "Then we moved to Holland when I was 12. A few years there, then Belgium." It was here he began his formal fashion education at Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts – a place that felt like the polar opposite to his worldly youth. "I didn't feel at home there. Due to my past, I always kind of felt like a stranger. Sometimes there's a comfort to being a stranger. You're the observer," he says. "But in Antwerp, I didn't feel like the good stranger. I came from countries that were so bright and colourful. But here, the sky was so low, it felt like you could almost reach out and touch it." Despite this, and an expulsion from art school for failing to turn in coursework, his tutelage was also a hard-won lesson in how he could improve his fashion standing, and his understanding of it. "It was not a circus," he says. "In Antwerp, there's so much respect for the person who wears the clothes. You carry the clothes more than a lot of other countries. There's a beauty to that."

This masterful tightrope walk between fantasy and function has been perfected over the better part of three decades. His signature is sci-fi, but sumptuous; sexual, but subtle. The resulting Haider Ackermann own-label stans are many. They take it seriously, too. Johann, a model in Stuttgart, is quite proud of a funnel-necked sweatshirt in

a very Haider shade of Martian desert: "I was going through this vintage store in the city called Vintendo Archive. The simplicity [of the sweatshirt] stood out really. Even though you can wear it as a statement piece, you can also just wear it as a normal basic." Francis Kassatly, a TikTok fashion pundit who encourages people to "buy less, buy better, wear it more", is into Ackermann's "heavy use of noble fibres like silk and cashmere". He's followed the designer for years, too: "I was in my 20s, so I had to buy intentionally. The first item I ever purchased was a gold velvet bomber with ruched sleeves. It was a size too large but I grew into it over time. It's eight years old now, but wearing it still feels as fresh as day one."

Ackermann feels like a serious fan himself – especially of the auteurs of fashion who seem to float above the marketing-product churn. "Luxury needs to be defined," he says, when asked about the industry's current state. "Oh my God, so many luxury houses don't feel luxury for me. They don't make me dream like they used to. We only talk about sales and figures but we have a responsibility to the next generation. I remember so many designers that made me dream, whether it was Mr Saint Laurent, or Helmut Lang, Rei Kawakubo; all of them." I ask if all the dreamers have been lost to this insomniac world of profit margins and bottom lines. "All is never lost," he says. "Look at the work of Rick Owens, or [Nicolas] Ghesquière, or Comme des Garçons. I look up to them all."

Many members of fashion's cognoscenti have spoken highly of Ackermann in the past. "Well, hopefully not all in the past," he laughs. I mention Karl Lagerfeld, the late designer who felt more like Chanel's tinselled emperor than its mere creative director. Ackermann nods respectfully. In 2010, Lagerfeld seemed to publicly anoint Ackermann as his heir apparent, telling *Numéro* magazine: "I have a contract for life, so it all depends on who I would like to hand it to. At the moment I'd say Haider Ackermann." That must have been a head-fuck of the highest order, I say. "It was very strange, because he and I were obviously quite close. But we never spoke about it," says Ackermann. "I think his purpose was more to put the light on me – 'Look at this guy.' I'm not sure he really would have liked me to be at Chanel." There's a pause in the room, Ackermann tilting his head. "Y'know, he would always send me flowers just two minutes before a show. Two minutes before, I would get flowers. I always took it as a gift, and… it was a beautiful push."

Ackermann also caught the attention of Jean Paul Gaultier, the grand couturier who made sailors sexy and pop-cultural history out of conical bras. In January 2023, Ackermann debuted his collection as guest creative director for the brand, a custodian role that has carouselled through head designers ever since Gaultier retired in 2020. Menswear press rarely attend haute couture shows (these are the most artistic and meticulous collections, made exclusively for top-tier clients, a large proportion of whom are women with offshore bank accounts). So I didn't get to see Ackermann's colossal symmetry of feathers and beading in person – but *Dazed* fashion features director Emma Davidson did. She was, in her own words, "gagged". "I think Haider's Jean Paul Gaultier collection was the biggest surprise for me, and maybe even up there in my top few as the collaborations I've loved the most," she says. "When that men's coat that was crafted from thousands of pins came down the catwalk, you could genuinely hear people gasp – because the soundtrack was so low, you could hear them bouncing against one another, and it became this whole sensory thing. I think he's one of the sexiest designers out there right now."

Ackermann surveilled Gaultier himself for the duration of the show. His reaction was the most important. And, unsurprisingly, he was won over. "Attending the Haider show and watching all the stunning looks on the runway, I found myself feeling like a client," Gaultier says. "I was thinking, I would absolutely buy this."

"To work on haute couture was the reason why I did fashion in the first place. [I wanted] to collaborate with all of those people in the ateliers. It is a complete love affair," says Ackermann. "I don't know anyone who is more passionate than all of those women who sit for hours and hours destroying their eyes, because they have to be so focused. Everything counts for them."

Ackermann's pursuit of beauty has taken him across the fashion landscape. In October 2023, he launched

Above: Jean Paul Gaultier by Haider Ackermann SS23 show at Paris Haute Couture Week. *Opposite, from top*: looks from Berluti SS18 and AW17; Haider Ackermann SS19 ready-to-wear show at Paris Fashion Week.

> "Karl Lagerfeld always sent me flowers just two minutes before a show. I took it as a gift. It was a beautiful push."

a collab with cult rich-lady cosmetic brand Augustinus Bader. In 2024, it was a crossover with Fila that nodded to the luxury raver (that collection, in its kaleidoscopic opulence, isn't so far from his work at Canada Goose). Before that, he was creative director at Berluti for three seasons, a period he describes as "a beautiful journey". Under Ackermann, the storied leather goods house took a turn to the streamlined with clean, razor-sharp separates that felt sexier and quietly self-assured. By 2018 standards, before big houses routinely burned through creative directors, his three-season reign was relatively short. But still, it's a period that the designer looks back on fondly.

In this age of "overnight success" artifice, Ackermann's rise is more honestly chronicled. After leaving Antwerp, he interned for the arch enfant terrible of '90s fashion, John Galliano, who made a huge impression. "He was so convinced by the story he would tell every different person, every model," Ackermann says. "You'd believe in his dreams, you would enter his dreams. And that's a gift – to convince people about beauty."

In 2001, Ackermann put this world-building masterclass to practice. His womenswear debut in Paris was the first collection under his own name, and it immediately played his trump card: a sophisticated futurism full of draping. For decades he has managed to create squeaky-clean angularity with draped fabrics that feel tailored and form-fitting. Many designers would achieve such simplicity by shearing fabrics and stitching them together; Ackermann layers them like a master atelier of ancient Rome.

It's right there as he sits opposite me, wearing an off-white Prada sweatshirt over his shoulders. But rather than knotting at the sternum, Ackermann's is tied artfully at the upper collarbone. The Italian cotton rolls across his chest like a Viennetta ice cream. (I have tried to recreate it many times in a mirror with my own sweatshirts to no avail, for these hands are not Haider Ackermann's.)

This sort of expertise attracted investors to his label, and Belgian entrepreneur Anne Chapelle became a major backer and owner of the brand in 2013. But as the fashion industry was paralysed by the Covid pandemic, Ackermann all but left the company amid reportedly significant losses. Chapelle retained the brand name in a licensing agreement, and there was a rumoured legal fallout as Haider Ackermann, the fashion house, ceased production in 2020. "When I got my name back, it was a relief," says Ackermann. "My name is everything I own. It's the name that came from my parents, and as an adopted person, it's the only thing I have from them. So I treasure it. Knowing that someone could take it away from me…" He pauses for a moment. "I'm not interested in talking about that period of my life."

And yet still, there was another lesson to be taken from this episode. "Before, I was very naive. If kids asked me for advice, I'd say, 'Follow your dreams. Don't let anyone stop your dreams.' But nowadays, you have to be anchored in reality and surround yourself with lawyers from the first minute. It would have changed my life if I'd have done that," he says. "Creative people are in a bubble. We're thinking about fabrics and the little colours and we don't think any further."

The creative process hasn't been all love and light, either. I point to a 2017 Q&A with online interview directory The Talks in which Ackermann spoke at length about his own dark places. "I mean yes, I wasn't happy. I was not breathing," he says. "I knew something was wrong, and I knew I was in this bad situation and everyone told me so. And sometimes, out of fear, you don't step out." He rattles through concerns that you assume might plague a fashion creative at his level – concerns one rarely hears out loud. "You might not work any longer. You might not have any shows any more. And that's what my world is about, what my work is about. I allowed it because I was scared to lose all of this. And now, I can breathe again."

TOM FORD OFTEN feels like a label steered not by the heart, but by the loins. Ever since the designer broke out at Gucci in 1995, sex has fuelled his grand machine. Not bawdy, primal, guttural sex. But flashy, desirable, an otherworldly sort of sex that's more gilded than it is pornographic; think of Nicolas Winding Refn, the director of *Drive* and *The Neon Demon*, if he were to produce an erotic thriller set in Studio 54. For Tom Ford, it is a sex that's detached from reality, and one that smartly utilises the power of suggestion; a Gucci campaign from 1997 shows a metallic heel pressing into the skin of a man's bare, carven chest. That one simple image can launch a thousand mental images more complex and graphic in nature (granted, other campaigns were a lot more explicit). Thus, Tom Ford built an erotic empire of elegance and sensuality, with a tiny bit of disco thrown in for fun.

As one of few eponymous fashion labels to become an actual household name in the 21st century, Tom Ford holds jurisdiction over menswear, womenswear, beauty, fragrance and leather goods to the tune of millions. As former *Vogue* critic Tim Blanks wrote in his review of a spring 2014 show, there is a "dichotomy that defines Tom Ford – laser-eyed commerce here, lascivious indulgence there". Sex still sells. Especially the expensive kind.

Since the designer vacated his own label upon its sale, Ford's shoes have only been filled temporarily. Peter Hawkings, his former protégé, took the wheel for less than a year. Now, the brand is preparing for the incoming Ackermann administration. The founder, it turns out, had a hand in this succession. "He's the one who called me," says Ackermann. "Of course we spoke many, many times. I wouldn't have done it without his approval or

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benediction. It's very important for a company when the name is so present."

He can only say so much about the Tom Ford appointment. His first collection will debut at Paris Fashion Week in March. Throughout the afternoon, though, Ackermann leaves a few glittering clues. Like Ford, he is a designer with "sexy" often affixed to his placard. But it is a different sort of sexy. If Tom Ford's sensuality is more chemical, Ackermann's is emotional – a mood, or a gesture, or a moment. This is a man who, by his own admission, "take[s] love very seriously". To him, the idea of elegance is much more abstract, something rooted in memory. He is almost philosophical. "I met two men in my life: Monsieur Serge Lutens, the perfumier, and recently, Mr Lauder. He's 92 years old," Ackermann says. "It's about their generosity. They've been searching for beauty for so many years. They have this quest. The way they speak is beyond elegant, the way they look into your eyes and make you feel part of this. It's so elegant. They reach out to you."

If Ford was all glistening glam sex, then maybe Ackermann will lean even further into the power of suggestion – especially in this age of steamy Hollywood style. "There's no mystery on the red carpet," he says. "It can be too obvious; there's nothing to discover. You have everything up in your face." I counter that this era of menswear could allow men to be more experimental and expressive. He disagrees. "That's not true. Look at David Bowie, Mick Jagger, Jimi Hendrix. It was authentic. Their life was authentic. Now, it feels more like attention-seeking, screaming louder than the one next to you," he says, and shrugs. "The world is too loud."

Ackermann seems to thrive in a Venn diagram between the quasi-traditional and the eccentric. On one hand, he praises London as "very sexy" for its "sense of freedom, and the liberty, and the madness". But then he points to its more conservative buttoned-up roots, because people wear bespoke suits in the city's moneyed western enclave. In New York, he loves the energy. But there's also a fashion legacy that's to be preserved. "On a Saturday evening, we went for dinner at a very chic restaurant where people still dressed up and made an effort," he says of his most recent trip to Manhattan. "It was all old businessmen. All in suits, and the women made an effort – whether you like it or not. There were pearls, there were black dresses. It felt so right to look at." At Tom Ford, perhaps all parts of Ackermann's universe – the sci-fi, the elegant, the quietly suggestive, the sexy – will collide. "It's nice not to wear sneakers. It's nice to stand up straight. It's nice to feel your shoes are just a little too narrow, and you have to sit differently," says Ackermann. "The hair is perfect. The perfume is good. The moustache is well cut. It's kind of a respect to everyone around."

There is a distinct pressure that comes with two concurrent creative directorships, especially at a time in fashion when, as Ackermann puts it, "everything and everyone is replaceable". He admits to some nerves. He has to feel that his work is additive. "I'm not easily accepting of any job, and I've been declining many things," he says. "There have been big brands, big companies, really beautiful names, but I didn't have the feeling that my sensibility would add something to it. It didn't feel right. But yeah, everything I'm doing now feels right to me."

And behind him is a social network that the designer holds dear. Timothée Chalamet is part of this core circle. Some of the actor's most recognisable looks have come from Ackermann (think of the viral majestic silver tailoring on *The King*'s premiere trail). The two even worked together on a limited-edition hoodie in 2021, a paint-splattered charity piece from which all proceeds went to

Above: looks from the Haider Ackermann AW14 ready-to-wear show at Paris Fashion Week.

GQ World Fashion

“I am content. I feel more free than I’ve ever been. And this sort of freedom, you have no fear.”

Afghanistan Libre, an organisation that fights to safeguard women’s and children’s rights in that country. It’s a friendship, and a creative partnership. “We met due to his agent, Brian [Swardstrom], who wanted to meet,” says Ackermann. “The way he enters a room, one can only be seduced. He knew exactly what he was doing; he knows his path. So after five minutes, I knew we would work together, and I would agree to it and it’d make sense. It still makes sense after so many years.” The same can be said for Tilda Swinton, who befriended Ackermann after he declined a red carpet fitting because he was visiting Jaipur. “It must have been around 20 years ago,” he says.“I was going to India with my loved one. When I arrived back in Paris, we shared a moment. She asked why I could not do the fitting. I said I was in love. That’s when we fell in love with each other.”

Chalamet and Swinton are now regular front-rowers at his shows, and their trust in Ackermann allows him to feel safe. “They didn’t give up on me. And there I am, I’m faithful,” he says. “They could have chosen someone different to have made their life easier. But they chose me.”

And that sort of confidence, that trust, has reignited something in Ackermann. “I am content,” he says. “I feel more free than I’ve ever been. And this sort of freedom, you have no fear. You want to do things and continue and I’m well surrounded. I have the luxury of the best friends in the world.”

In fashion, one’s life’s work often becomes inextricable from one’s real life. Ackermann crossed couture, menswear, womenswear, beauty and back again, losing his name and finding it again in the process. As we finish our coffees, we discuss the benefits of a good eight hours’ rest. He insists, again, that I take a bike ride around Paris in the small hours. “It’s amazing,” he says, sliding on his signature tinted sunglasses (this time in baby blue). “At some point I will sleep. But not now.”

I wake up early, swollen-eyed, to wander the manicured limestone streets of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. It is silent. As I’m peacefully swallowed by the curative and consuming stillness of Paris at dawn, a city weathered by the ebbs and flows of countless careers in fashion, I realise that finally, deservedly, Haider Ackermann has found happiness. Unlike the spiritualists of old, his personal heaven is not an imagined place, but a peace of mind. He is free – free to exercise his vision, to create dreams again. “I have a feeling that my whole career has been leading to this point,” he told me the day before. “It is big, but it doesn’t feel that big because I’m ready, and I think my best years are yet to come. Hopefully.”

MURRAY CLARK *is* BRITISH GQ*’s senior style editor.*

The designer with Timothée Chalamet (*right*) and Tilda Swinton (*below*).

ON HAIDER, HAIR, ALI PIRZADEH. MAKE-UP, JOEY CHOY. RUNWAY PHOTOGRAPHS, TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET AND TILDA SWINTON, COURTESY OF GETTY.

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THE NEW LOCALS

GQ World Food

In disparate corners of the country, neighbourhood restaurants, sceney bakeries and home-from-home pubs are creating communities all of their own.

WHERE DO YOU go to feel at home that isn't... you know, home? Being a local is about more than living around the corner. It's the feeling of being brought into the fold. Across the country, a growing number of spots are realising that going out to eat and drink should – at its best, anyway – feel like buying into a club that says something particular about who you are.

Maybe it's the low-waste bakery you're happy to advertise with a canvas tote proclaiming its name in block capitals. Or the restaurant whose produce comes from a sustainable farm, and with a bottle shop that keeps the party going after last orders. These six places are changing what it means to be a local, with crowds of neighbours from near and far.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **BENJAMIN McMAHON**

GQ World
Food

FORNO

EAST LONDON

This local bakery is the new community centre – just ask the people queueing out of the door for its Maritozzi buns.

It is difficult to pinpoint when exactly the destination bakery became the cornerstone of each of London's hipster enclaves, but these days, a tote bag signalling that you fill your pastry order at Pophams or Toad is as much a status symbol as one that loudly announces to the Central line that you read the *Paris Review*.

At the white-hot bakery Forno – named, auspiciously, for the Italian word for oven – the queues still take its owner Mitshel Ibrahim by surprise, more than a year after it opened. "Saturday, Sunday is pretty mental," he tells me, after arriving on a dazzling weekday morning in September, chaining his bike up next to a sign printed with a favourite review: 'Hectic on the weekends… baking was good… not quite worth the hype. – Joe.'

Ibrahim, who is from Milan, was working at Forno's sister restaurant Ombra when the pandemic swept in. Ombra was a place where local creatives in east London's Bethnal Green could get a decent, affordable lunch, and so, with the same community-minded spirit, they made a Google Doc menu to sell fresh produce while the restaurant was shuttered. The hunger for handmade pasta and slow-cooked sauces was huge. When Ibrahim first made chiacchiere – a sugar-dusted, crinkle-edged strip of fried dough – the Italians stuck in England for the Easter lockdown mobbed Ombra's supplies. "We were like, Shit! There's a lot of people interested in these things," he says. "It didn't seem like many people were doing them considering how much interest we got."

This page, clockwise from top: trays for days; queueing for Maritozzi buns; ciabatta with prosciutto di San Daniele, stracciatella and green figs.

Clockwise from left: head of bread Daniel Westby; Forno dishes include focaccia Pugliese, Veneziana, nduja sausage rolls and of course, Maritozzi buns; the bakery in full swing; pomodorini sott'olio.

"I think it's illegal in Italy to make wine with the uva fragola grape… but it's delicious dotted in focaccia."
–FORNO'S MITSHEL IBRAHIM

The experiment led to Ibrahim opening Forno last year, selling Italian pastries like the Maritozzi bun, a sweet roll piped with a wedge of white cream, and squares of focaccia that look like giant sticky bubble wrap. There's a pain au chocolat on the counter too, but to order it here feels like missing the point.

Ibrahim's restaurants have a tradition of feeding their neighbours, but they have also become a different kind of community: a meeting place for the food-obsessed to hang. Ombra's Amici Miei – Italian for 'my mates' – pop-ups recently featured cooking from the chef of Rome's understated, oversubscribed restaurant SantoPalato. Meanwhile, at their raucous mortadella parties, guests eat sandwiches of the peppery, fatty meat made by butcher Federico Orsi, served alongside cold, frothy glasses of sparkling wine from Emilia-Romagna.

Ibrahim insisted I leave with some fruits of Forno's experiment in focaccia, featuring the inky purple grape uva fragola, which has a bubblegum-like flavour. "It's got a very high potential alcohol [content] which can make you blind," he says. "I think it's illegal in Italy to make wine with it… but it's delicious dotted in focaccia." For the faint of heart, there are tote bags too. —OLIVIA OVENDEN

HIGHER GROUND

MANCHESTER CITY CENTRE

A farm-to-table mini enterprise that sources vegetables from its local farm and has a wine bar for last orders.

Since opening in 2023, Manchester's Higher Ground has quickly become the centre of its own micro farm-to-table community. Alongside the popular bistro and the wine bar Flawd, head chef Joseph Otway, general manager Richard Cossins, and sommelier Daniel Craig Martin also run Cinderwood Market Garden, an organic farm where they grow their fruits and vegetables.

"The best way to get access to really high-quality produce is to grow it yourself," Otway says. Which isn't quite as simple as it sounds. Cinderwood is a one-and-a-half-acre market garden in Nantwich, Cheshire. Before that, it was an empty field. The three of them had to build the farm by hand with the help of head grower Michael Fitzsimmons in the sleet, rain, and sporadic sunshine of winter. In the words of Martin: "It was a dark, dark, cold time."

But it was worth the effort. As well as supplying the Higher Ground kitchen, the produce from Cinderwood ends up on the tables at some of Manchester's finest restaurants and bakeries. The bistro itself regularly collaborates with rising winemakers, such as Campania's Cantina Giardino, and teams up for sell-out dinners with out-of-town restaurants like Berlin's Barra and Copenhagen's Brasserie Post.

What's grown at Cinderwood often dictates what's on the menu at Higher Ground, with roughly half of the produce in the kitchen coming directly from the farm. The fruits and vegetables are harvested less than 24 hours before delivery, and thrown into everything from a plate of Great White tomatoes with cured trout and salted plum, to a courgette and pork shoulder ragù. Whatever they can't grow themselves, they try to source locally.

"Yes, there's extra work involved but there's also the beauty of the community you get to deal with," says Martin. "We're working –and communicating – directly with farmers and butchers every day of every week."

Even the pig for that pork shoulder ragù was reared at Jane's Farm, in the field next door to Cinderwood, with those same pigs having helped to break up and enrich the soil the courgettes were grown on. "We're always trying to get the whole picture or narrative into the food," says Otway. "But we don't want to ram it down people's throats and we don't want to greenwash. We've always wanted this restaurant to be a fun place to come to – that's the main thing."

Eat at Higher Ground and you'll quickly realise how fun it is. As septuagenarian couples kiss knees under the warm glow of an overhead bulb, and finance lads gets rowdy in the corner, you'd struggle to believe that the trio were nervous about the opening, having no previous connection to Manchester. "We did a lot of hard work researching and tuning into what the city needed," says Richard. "We knew we needed to open somewhere where we could meet and greet Manchester on its terms."

The city has embraced them with open arms. Or as one local in a Salford Red Devils shirt peering through the window, using his hands as binoculars, said in a brief review: "Fucking class."

—LUCAS OAKELEY

From top: front-row seats; cook Will Shaw mashes spuds; ingredients are all sourced and grown locally; head chef Joseph Otway, sommelier Daniel Craig Martin and GM Richard Cossins. Opposite page: the kitchen mid-service.

GQ World
Food

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Food

AKARA

BOROUGH YARDS, SOUTH LONDON

Where a fusion of cooking communities meet, plating internet hype with West African soul food.

Growing up in Nigeria, enjoying akara for breakfast was a part of Aji Akokomi's everyday routine. "There's nobody that lives in West Africa that wouldn't have akara and ogi for breakfast," the cook and restaurateur behind Akara tells me. According to Akokomi, the dish – a crisp, fluffy, fried fritter made from black-eyed beans – is "something you cook at home or have as street food every day. It's so popular that you could argue that people eat akara a lot more than jollof rice."

It should come as no surprise, then, that these airy fried buns are getting their dues as the centrepiece of Akokomi's most recent restaurant opening. The fritters that have food enthusiasts heading to London's Borough Yards aren't an exact replica of the ones Akokomi grew up eating. Instead, his eatery's iterations are a representation of the dish seen through the West African diaspora in Brazil, which truly helped him appreciate akara for what it is. Similarly named acarajé, the southern American take sees the round bun split and stuffed with meat, fish and delicately cooked vegetables. "For West African people it's just a basic boring breakfast – as common as beans on toast is in the UK – so people don't see it as interesting. Whereas Brazilians believe that this is a dish that shows us the weight of God and where our roots are from. It's revered."

"Brazilians believe this dish shows us the weight of God and where our roots are from."
–AKARA'S AJI AKOKOMI

Part of a growing, influential clutch of West African-inspired restaurants including Chishuru, Ikoyi and Akokomi's first restaurant, the Michelin-starred Akoko, Akara has played a key role in bringing the cooking of the expansive region to the forefront of London's dining scene. A street away from one of the world's most influential food markets, the eatery has, like Nigerian tapas restaurant Chuku's in Tottenham, become a different kind of local. A place where people of all cultures flock to enjoy akara piled with piquant barbecued prawns or rich, indulgent crab kulikuli (fried peanut paste), alongside flame-licked meat and fish, such as sea bream and beef short rib infused with the warming spices of West Africa.

Fourteen months since opening, bookings are hard to come by. Though if you ask Akokomi, turning the humble akara into a refined, stylish dish has not proved to be to everyone's taste. "We've had a couple of social media videos which have had well over a million views," he says. "But many West African and Brazilian people are questioning, 'How can this dish be made fine dining?' or saying, 'Don't touch it, it's so traditional.'" He pauses, and lets out a laugh, because clearly, that's not stopping him. —JOANNA TAYLOR

Clockwise from top: production lead Bienvenu Singbo, pastry chef Neha Mirchandani and head chef Erik Lucas Miotto; Lagos chicken and citrus hot sauce with a vodka and peach; a different kind of local; owner Aji Akokomi.

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THE BULL

CHARLBURY, THE COTSWOLDS

This centuries-old building given the juiced-up pub treatment is a hub for neighbourhood meet-ups.

The Bull in Charlbury is a new pub that feels like an old one. In truth, it *is* actually an old one. The Bull has served as a watering hole of some form since the early 1500s, but the recent revamp of this Cotswolds spot has elevated it into the ether of legendary pubs: a centre of gravity for neighbours, a fantastic place to eat, and an actual scene in the middle of Oxfordshire's rolling hills.

Co-owners Phil Winser and James Gummer have perfected the science of pub alchemy. Back in 2022, they bought their beloved local The Pelican, a sleepy Victorian boozer in Notting Hill, west London, and turned it into somewhere Dua Lipa is a regular and snagging a weekend table is an impressive feat.

Both restaurateurs are from Charlbury, sharing a nostalgic fondness for The Bull. "I was there since I was two, Phil was there since he was two," Gummer says, of the area. "The pub was part of our community."

The renovation of The Bull began quietly, with The Pelican hosting a pop-up at the old pub for a few weeks, followed by a short stretch of construction. The ancient bits of the pub are still there – uneven wooden beams, open fireplace, low ceilings, stone flooring – but any distress is artful rather than grimy. The new modern touches are subtle: staff dress in muted moss green, the dining room is softly lit by candles, and the wine list is mostly old world, with just two skin contact options for the natty wine crowd.

Clockwise from top: fare includes roast potatoes, beetroot and goat's curd; apple pie and custard; the pub's 16th-century facade; co-founder James Gummer.

The food is wonderfully unfussy. The Bull's chefs handle fresh meat, fish and produce sparingly: flat iron steak is cooked over charcoal and paired with a dollop of horseradish sauce, skate served simply cooked with a handful of grilled tomatoes.

Taking a page from The Pelican, neighbours can get together at The Bull's candle-making workshops, comedy nights and a recurring Charlbury Chinwag lunch for seniors. "I think people locally were really craving another reason to come out," Gummer says. "They do genuinely treat it like a bit of an extension of their own home." It's a throwback to the platonic ideal of the pub as a clubhouse for a neighbourhood. As such, The Bull tries to keep things within the community, with Gummer and Winser forging close bonds with local suppliers, as well as investing in a holding at nearby Bruern Farm, where they grow their own veg.

The pair's fiefdom of pub clubhouses continues to grow. There is west London's recently refurbished The Hero in Maida Vale, with its pink-washed walls and glossy chicken pies which kept it booked all summer. More London pubs are on the horizon, with another in Notting Hill (joining Thomas Straker's restaurant on Golborne Road), as well as The Coach in Clerkenwell. Their pub vision might be ever-expanding, but Gummer is adamant there should always be walk-in room. "You don't want to have to book your local a month in advance."—REBECCA DOLAN

Clockwise from left: black pudding, onion, peach and watercress; Tim, front of house and chef Ariene; red mullet and rouille; the kitchen and dining room is open plan.

SARGASSO

MARGATE, KENT

The seaside haunt where Margate's creative community meet for luxury anchovies and Sunday afternoon raves.

Sargasso is right there when you leave Margate train station. Not there there, but square in your eyeline, as you look across the seaside town's bay towards a stubby pier. There, in a long, squat brick building that was once a lifeboat house, is Sargasso. "It's like working on a boat. You've literally got salt leaching through the walls," says co-manager Ed Wilson, fingering the slightly crumbling plaster and jabbing a finger at the patches of rust on the ceiling. "When the wind's blowing right, the waves come over the top."

Sargasso was opened in 2019 by the electronic musician Matthew Herbert, but ran into trouble during the pandemic, and in 2021, Herbert approached his friends Wilson and Josie Stead for help relaunching it. The pair already had a restaurant, the celebrated Brawn in Hackney, east London. But, Wilson says, they also had a post-Covid ambition to establish a "nice little sideline" outside the capital.

Under their management, Sargasso has become a great success. Restaurant critics paid homage to its Cantabrian anchovies. It got onto lists and into guides. But the team were vigilant against it sliding off its pier into a frothy sea of culinary hype. When potential customers began assuming it was more booked up than it actually was, they simplified the menu and stopped laying the tables with wine glasses.

Sargasso is open seven days a week, year-round. That consistency is "really helpful if you are trying to build a community", says Wilson. In winter, when the tide of tourists ebbs out and Margate once again becomes a "sleepy little town," Sargasso is more geared to locals. The resort's most famous daughter, Tracey Emin, comes in, always with a big group in tow. Local galleries, like the Turner Contemporary a short postprandial walk away, supply patrons. Some are so dedicated that Wilson will ferry them to the restaurant in his car when the pier floods. He reels off businesses owned by friends –

"It's like working on a boat. You've literally got salt leaching through the walls."

—SARGASSO'S ED WILSON

"Angela's/Dory's, Little Swift…" – while pointing at them across the bay.

The restaurant also hosts Sargasso Sundays, a monthly music event. The tables, built on hinges, fold into the wall. A sound system is brought in. Half of the tiny kitchen becomes a DJ booth. It starts early, around 5pm, and runs until 11pm, or sometimes later in high summer, and is where Margate's hospitality scene congregates after Sunday's lunch service. Wilson is involved in music and has famous DJing friends, like Gilles Peterson, but says he could easily fill the programme exclusively with locals, such is the calibre of Margate talent.

Angelo Mazzone, Sargasso's events manager, comes over to our table, and the pair start reminiscing about their favourite nights. One of Mazzone's was last summer, when the DJs finished with a jungle remix of Anita Baker's "Sweet Love". People "went completely wild" and started dancing on the bar, he says. Not bad for a salty old lifeboat house. —JOSIAH GOGARTY

TOLLINGTON'S

FINSBURY PARK, NORTH LONDON

Housed in a former chip shop, this fish bar sells delicious Iberian food at community-friendly prices in a welcomingly unpretentious setting.

You can feel the excitement in the air at Tollington's, the Finsbury Park fish bar, every Friday night. It's in the hiss of the plancha as ruby-red prawns and fish kiss superheated metal; in the excitable motion of the waiters as they dart between tightly packed tables in the former chippy to plop down ice-cold Estrellas, or a plate of crisp croquetas just plucked from the fryer. It feels like you're in a room full of regulars who return as much, if not more, for the scene of familiar-looking foodies as the fleeting clout of frequenting one of London's trendiest spots.

Surveying the scene from behind the open bar is owner Ed McIlroy. As a chef, he arrived on the north London dining scene in 2019 with Four Legs, a kitchen residency at Islington's Compton Arms, before crowdfunding his way into local lore a couple of years later by restoring a neighbourhood boozer in Finsbury Park. A scruffy pub instantly beloved by locals and the customers who poured their own money into it, The Plimsoll quickly became known for its cooking – their signature smashburger or chipolatas with mustard on the changing menu alongside grilled Dover sole or delicate little quails.

With The Plimsoll and now Tollington's, McIlroy has consolidated his reputation for creating the kind of nostalgic, lived-in spaces that people want to return to again and again, with the kind of pretence-free atmosphere and approachability that fosters a genuine sense of community.

Tollington's is as much of a love letter to the disappearing pubs, chippies and cafes that define so much of London's spirit as any of the capital's grand dining rooms. Both McIlroy and Tollington's general manager Sylvie Pyne take their roles as neighbourhood custodians seriously, valuing longevity over unsustainable hype: "We'll always listen to what a regular has to say," McIlroy says. "When someone uses a place often and really knows what you're doing, they become your friends."

They have intentionally priced Tollington's so that locals can drop in for a plate of the kitchen's decadent chips bravas – a spin on the ubiquitous Spanish tapa, fashioned here from pudgy beef dripping chips crisped in the original fryers – or a £2.30 glass of beer while spending well under a tenner. They're also keen to fulfil Tollington's role as a bellwether of the weekend by selling fish and chips on Fridays, though, as McIlroy puts it, "spending £12 on octopus just isn't the same as spending £10 on fish and chips. That's the one that plays on me a bit."

His peers, though, are more generous. "There are multitudes within the style of cooking and hospitality at Tollington's," says Dara Klein, a regular and fellow chef who took up the mantle at The Compton Arms after McIlroy departed. "Ed really is someone who cares deeply about community. Tollington's reflects that beautifully, because there's always space for you." —DAVID PAW

From top: chippy tea cooked by owner Ed McIlroy; hanging John Dory; whole fried Dory. Opposite page: McIlroy says he always listens to his regulars.

“When someone uses a place often and knows what you’re doing, they become your friends.”

—ED McILROY

Level Up

Upgrade your bathroom cabinet and discover your next holy grail grooming product with Latest in Beauty.

WHEN IT COMES to men's grooming, there's never been so much choice – but the aisles upon aisles of products can sometimes be a double edged sword, and it's easier to grab the first thing you recognise, rather than branch out and try something new. Enter Latest in Beauty, a firm that essentially acts as a personal shopper for all your grooming necessities. Thanks to its range of curated boxes filled with must-try brands, this is the best way to discover new favourites.

Its latest box, The Ultimate Men's Grooming Edit, contains – as you might have guessed – everything any man should need. It's filled with 20 products from some of the UK's most luxurious brands: many of them full sizes, rather than samples, so you can actually try them properly.

The kit has everything you'll need to look fresh for the upcoming party season, from Ruffians Beard & Hair Oil to Davidoff Cool Water eau de toilette. Late nights won't have an impact, either: Transformulas Marine Miracle EyeZone rejuvenates and firms the delicate under-eyes, while the Skincycles Eye Matrix Mask is the perfect emergency de-puffer. And if your new year's resolution is to spend more time on self care, you couldn't ask for a better selection to get you started. The Cicapair So Soothing Treatment from cult favourite Dr Jart+ banishes redness and evens skin tone, while the Dr Sebagh Retinol Night Repair Serum stimulates cell renewal while you sleep, for a fresher appearance. Aromatherapy Associates De-Stress Muscle Gel is a lifesaver after a heavy gym session, gently soothing away aches and pains with a light scent of lavender, rosemary, and black pepper.

The box isn't just a chance to discover products you'll purchase again and again: with a value of £420 and a price of £80, it's a real bargain too. *GQ* readers will also receive a £20 discount and free delivery with the code GQREADER20. What's not to love?

The Ultimate Men's Grooming Edit, from Latest in Beauty, offers a range of quality products, for every self-care goal.

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A Companion for Your Wrist

Audemars Piguet's new release with artist Brian Donnelly, AKA Kaws, brings high-art hype to the world of pop-watch collabs. By CAM WOLF

OVER THE PAST two years, Brian Donnelly, the artist better known as Kaws, became skilled at avoiding public detection. If a photographer approached him at an event, he'd subtly twist his wrist inward. He couldn't risk giving away the secret project he's been working on since 2022. But in early September some Instagram sleuths zoomed in on his wrist to find the telltale Kaws Xs on the face of his Audemars Piguet Royal Oak – the same Xs he regularly paints over the eyes of Bart Simpson, SpongeBob, Elmo and other famous cartoons. The news was out: a Kaws Royal Oak was on the way. "I was bummed that the watch got out to the public, because I wanted to keep the snow fresh," Donnelly told me during a video call recently.

However, the actual watch he made in collaboration with Audemars Piguet, which was released on 19 November, has little in common with the custom one he was caught wearing. The real thing, called the Royal Oak Concept Tourbillon "Companion", features an obsessively crafted miniature recreation of the artist's Companion figure trapped inside the watch face, palms pressed out against the crystal. Despite this demented greyscale Mickey Mouse–like figurine, the titanium watch is "shockingly light", Donnelly said, and comes with a brand-new movement with a tourbillon true to AP's technical prowess.

While Donnelly has returned again and again to iconic cartoon characters for his work, the roots of this new Royal Oak Concept go back to another fictional universe: Marvel comics. In the last few years, the watchmaker has released a series of timepieces with Black Panther and Spider-Man figures at the centre. Those superhero designs showed Kaws that Audemars Piguet could make real his vision. "I thought, If I'm going to do a watch with them, I want to do something that's really in line with the sculptures I do and have it live in a watch space," Donnelly explained. "Seeing the Marvel [watches], immediately I knew there was no question we could go in that direction."

The sculpture inside the case is a shrunken version of the large-scale Companions that Donnelly shows in galleries and museums around the world. "I'm used to working with these massive scales of 20 metres, so to work on something that's sitting [inside a watch that's] just 43 mm is really interesting," he said. But whether he's building a three-storey sculpture or one fit for a wrist, he's looking for the best materials and partners. "I'm fascinated by watches," said Donnelly. "There's so much that goes into this small, little object; it's a little jewel box." AP isn't enlisting Donnelly only for the wrist-sized work – the artist is also installing a large, inflatable Companion on the roof of the manufacturer's headquarters in Le Brassus, Switzerland.

This Kaws collaboration is the natural result of watch fascination transcending the niche world of die-hard enthusiasts. Donnelly sees a similar thing happening in the art world. "I feel like the watch world has gone through a similar growth [to art] where it might have existed in this connoisseur niche," he said, "and now it's opened up to a lot more people." As a consequence, the watch industry has been evolving to welcome new clients. Few do this better than Audemars Piguet, which has collaborated across the pop culture spectrum, from Marvel to Travis Scott to fashion designer Matthew Williams.

Watch enthusiasts often argue that there is no luxury better than a timepiece, because you can take it everywhere. The Ferrari gets left in the garage, and the ski chalet in the Alps sits empty for months at a time. You could buy one of Donnelly's paintings for a few million pounds, but it will remain stuck on your wall when you leave for dinner. The Kaws AP, however, will be your faithful companion wherever you go.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION, KELSEY NIZIOLEK. AUDEMARS PIGUET: COURTESY OF THE BRAND.

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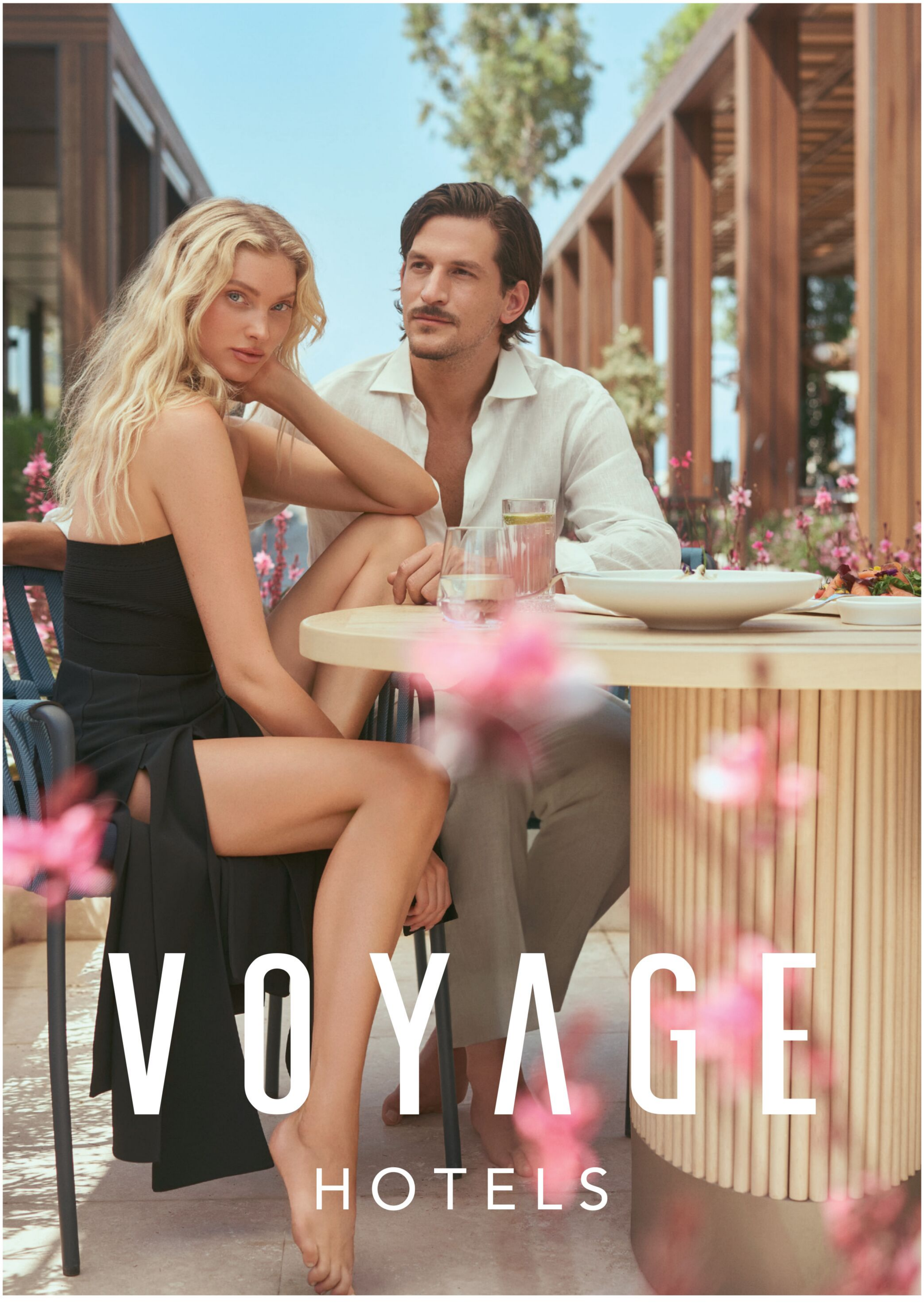
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GQ World Culture

After a stop-start ascent, the actor and star of *Blink Twice* is finally getting her flowers. Her past disappointments have taught her not to take it lightly.

By IANA MURRAY

HAIR, JAMES CATALANO. MAKE-UP, KENNETH SOH USING VIOLETTE_FR.

You Can't Miss Naomi Ackie

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **RONAN McKENZIE**
STYLED BY **CANDICE BAILEY**

GQ World

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TWENTY YEARS AGO, Naomi Ackie was squashed up against metal barriers in Leicester Square, at the London premiere of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. She was one of hundreds waiting for Daniel Radcliffe – hoping for an autograph, or even just a glimpse of him. Hours passed, the sky greyed, and Ackie's willpower drained with the downpour. "Reality hit me that I was waiting in the pouring rain to see someone who was never going to see me," she remembers. So she left – and never did spot the boy wizard. "But I always thought that Leicester Square was that kind of pinnacle thing," Ackie says. "Like, if I managed to get a premiere at Leicester Square with my face on a poster – that is success."

It occurred to her that she was firmly on the other side of the barrier at this summer's premiere of *Blink Twice*, Zoë Kravitz's biting eat-the-rich satire that ushered in the actor as a shape-shifting leading woman. Ackie's face, captured in the throes of terror, was plastered on posters around Leicester Square. And in between the rushed interviews and the paparazzi flashes, a woman – a fan – gifted Ackie an Eras Tour–style friendship bracelet with colourful beads spelling out "Jannah", the name of her bow-wielding reformed stormtrooper in *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*. "It's the first thing I've ever been given by someone in that kind of way," she says. Ackie had ascended to the rare echelon of fame where people are willing to stand for hours, brave the elements and vie for a chance to see her. She extends her arm to show the bracelet wrapped around her wrist. "I haven't taken it off."

OPENING PAGE
Jumper by **16Arlington.** Ring by **Alighieri.**

THIS PAGE
Shirt by **Ami.** Rings by **Maria Black.**

OPPOSITE PAGE
Dress and jacket by **Gucci.**

Ackie arrived for our interview straight from the gym in a patterned denim jacket and jeans, apologising for her flustered post-workout state. "How have I never heard of this place before?" she says, taking in the rustic columns and floor-to-ceiling Renaissance-style paintings of Candid Café, a Mediterranean spot tucked down a side street in London's Angel and hidden up enough flights of stairs to make you second-guess whether you're going the right way. It's a sweaty September afternoon and we're the only people here, save for the one member of staff on shift and a couple chatting by their open laptops.

The neighbourhood is still fairly new to Ackie. During the pandemic, she moved into a semi-basement flat by Regent's Canal, and – while she can laugh about it now – living somewhere so subterranean that vitamin D was hard to come by eroded her mental health. "The bedroom was at the front of the flat, so I would wake up and see feet constantly walking – 'I want to be where the people are!'" she sings, evoking *The Little Mermaid*. (She moved to a new flat above ground a year ago.) "I have to be in a place of deep discomfort to make changes."

That philosophy of discomfort has applied to more than just her living arrangements. For years after her film debut opposite Florence Pugh in 2016's *Lady Macbeth*, Ackie had been a reliably captivating supporting actor who struggled to break out of the acclaimed, if little-seen, British projects that made her. By age 27, roles were sparse and she considered quitting acting altogether. "I was so bored and tired and poor," she sighs. "You know that myth they say about women? You get to a certain age and the opportunities dry up. I was kind of like, Fuck, all my young, amazing years are disappearing. No one is going to want me." Then, on the precipice of giving it all up, she landed *Star Wars*; afterwards, a Bafta for *The End of the F***ing World*, a starring role in the Whitney Houston biopic *I Wanna Dance With Somebody*, and the attention of directors from Kravitz to Bong Joon-ho.

"Her range is something that I don't think we've seen a lot in this industry," says Kravitz. "I just hope that the industry will continue to embrace that

and give her these roles that show all these different sides of her. She's the real deal. She's an artist, and she's a movie star." Sometimes, rock bottom is a catapult.

ACKIE IS IN the midst of chauffeuring her co-star Helen Mirren around in golf carts on the set of *The Thursday Murder Club*, the film adaptation of Richard Osman's blisteringly popular page-turner, which is being co-produced by Netflix and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment. At this point, it's been two weeks since the release of *Blink Twice*, in which Ackie's wide-eyed cocktail waitress gets ensnared by the charms of a tech billionaire (played by a devious Channing Tatum) and his secluded island. For a story about power, wealth and women's oppression, Ackie calls the experience "one of the most positive, progressive sets I've ever been on." Even the premiere was fairly smooth, a rare occurrence, given Ackie has previously struggled with the "sensory overload" of red carpets. "It was the first time I'd been able to cope without having a panic attack afterwards," she admits. "I would finish every red carpet from *Star Wars* to Whitney with some level of a breakdown."

To understand what made *Blink Twice* different, you first need to know about *I Wanna Dance With Somebody*. The Whitney biopic, released in 2022, promised to be the breakthrough that Ackie had been waiting for: it was her first leading role, and she was playing one of the most beloved pop stars of all time. But the end result failed to meet those expectations. (Ackie's performance was widely praised, but the film itself fell short of the *Bohemian Rhapsody*–level mega-hit that its producers were going for.)

"It was the first time I'd been able to cope without having a panic attack afterwards. I would finish every red carpet with some level of breakdown."

Ackie's difficulties with the film long predated the release. "Whitney's emotional world wasn't hard to handle," she says. "None of the acting stuff was hard to do. It was everything around it that was just shit. It was really hard to enjoy. It was an endurance thing for me, like, How do I handle my own mental health under this much pressure?" She prepped for a year, spent another seven months filming in Boston, and dropped around 13kg for the role. ("I didn't have to, but I needed to, personally. I don't look anything like Whitney, anyway.") Every waking moment was spent studying Houston, listening to her music on repeat, training her vocal cords to nail the accent. For Ackie, the film felt "too big", heavier than what she could handle at the time. "I buckled a few times under the weight of it."

When you spend so long thinking about someone else, she explains, you begin to lose yourself in the process. "A big lesson I learned was that I have to own the responsibility of taking on a lead role," she says. "I have to do the job to the best of my ability, but I cannot let it destroy my sense of self. And that one had to destroy my sense of self for me to learn that lesson."

And then she retreated back underground in that basement flat in Angel. "I sat at the end of my bed, and I just

THIS PAGE
Jumper by **16Arlington.**
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Vest by **Agolde.**
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wept," she remembers. "While I was there [in Boston] it felt like I would never leave. Then I got home, and it felt like I had blinked." All of that time had evaporated.

When Ackie returned home, she fell into a "deep depression. I needed a lot of therapy," she says. "A lot of medication to help me throughout. I was having a lot of panic attacks." She had also lost confidence in herself – not in her talent, but whether she could really handle the pressure of being number one on the call sheet. "It's not that anyone was particularly horrible on that set. Things go wrong on sets all the time, so it wasn't about that. It was really about the pressure I put on myself to endure it."

Six months later, Ackie flew to Mexico to shoot *Blink Twice*. She had been swimming in Whitney prep when Kravitz first requested a meeting about a film she was set to direct, then-titled *Pussy Island*. "I was like, Hold on, what the fuck?" Ackie remembers. "It was already mad enough that I was trying to play Whitney Houston, and now Zoë Kravitz wants to talk to me?" She devoured the script and spoke to Kravitz for two hours in order to "suss each other out," Ackie says. "It didn't feel like an audition. It was more like a meeting of minds."

Again, Ackie was playing the lead, but it felt like she had drawn the map of where Whitney went wrong, and knew what paths to avoid. This time, she understood that she didn't have to shoulder the burden alone. "Zoë created such a strong community on that set," Ackie says. "Every single one of those cast members I call my friend. It was stressful at some points, but we were a team."

"I can have an idea or a note, and the chances of Naomi one-upping that idea are very high," Kravitz echoes. "And that made me feel very comforted, because I didn't feel so alone either."

In a film that warrants a muttered "What the fuck?" for at least a dozen scenes, Kravitz saves the most audacious moment of what-the-fuckery for the end of *Blink Twice*. Ackie's character, Frida, has discovered that Tatum's Slater King has erased her memories of the horrific abuse he inflicted on her with a mystical perfume extracted from the island's native flower. Knife in hand, she sets off to take bloody revenge on the men complicit – and when it seems like Frida is going to

Shirt by **Moschino.** Skirt by **Tolu Coker.** Jumper by **Tod's.** Ear cuff by **Maria Black.** Belt, stylist's own.

"I thought if I got into a Marvel film I'd be a better human. I'd join the cool, exclusive club that'd provide safety from the insecurities I was feeling."

kill Slater too, she stops just short. Instead, she laces his vape with the same amnesiac flower that was in the perfume, saves him from the bloodbath, and eventually marries him in his permanently disoriented state, which she is facilitating. The ending has been controversial – Kravitz wants you to head to the pub afterwards and debate it – but even I was a bit wary. Is Frida not joining the very system that almost destroyed her? Is this supposed to be a good ending?

"Some people don't get it, but I think there's something fascinating about a character who's obsessed with power," says Ackie. "Frida is aware of her identity and the fact that she probably wouldn't be able to achieve that level of power without being in proximity to someone like Slater King. Her choosing to save him, even though it's unrealistic, speaks to an inner desire instead of an outward reality." For Ackie, Frida's endgame isn't necessarily meant to be empowering, but a "dirty success. "Sometimes we like to think if we had power, that we would be different, and we would be omnipotent, but the truth is absolute power corrupts absolutely. That ain't never gonna change, because we are all human and we are all fallible."

ACKIE USED TO feel the allure of power herself. When she was younger, she would drag her dad to the cinema for every Marvel movie, point at the screen and tell him that one day, that would be her up there in Lycra. "It went from being a career goal to a 'me' goal," she says, pulling her knee to her chest. "Like, somehow, if I got into a Marvel film, I would be on some level a better human. I would have joined the cool, exclusive club that would provide safety from the insecurities I was feeling."

It was her "Mount Olympus", as she calls it. She eagerly waited for any role that called for a "young, snappy Black girl", auditioned for *Eternals*, and lost out on She-Hulk to Tatiana Maslany. So far, none have quite worked out – yet. "My mum always used to say, 'What is for you won't pass you.'"

Ackie grew up in a block of flats in Camden before her family upgraded to a house in Walthamstow Village on the outskirts of east London. ("I just remember being so excited that we had stairs. It felt like the bougiest thing in the world.") Shyness used to consume her to the point that she was too afraid to change schools, so five days a week for five years, she and her mother would take the Tube all the way to Camden and back. Eventually, Ackie found that acting was the therapy she needed to manage her shyness. "It pushed me into a version of attention that I could control," she says. "Between the raising of the curtain and the shutting of the curtain, I was a character, and so the attention was on a very specific part of my work."

When she was 11, Ackie told her parents that she wanted to be an actor. Her dad worked for Transport for London and her mum for the NHS, but their working-class background was never a deterrent. "My mum was such a strategic woman," Ackie says. "When she saw that I was serious and that I had something, she was like, 'We're gonna figure out a way to get you as close to this as possible." They drew up a plan right then and there, knowing the barriers in place for working-class actors lacking the contacts and funds to get their foot in. "A lot of that was going, 'Right, let's work backwards,'" she continues, assuming the place of her mum. "'The best thing to do right now is to learn your craft, so you need to go to drama school. If you need to get into drama school, study *that* at college. You need to do *this* in secondary school.'" To have what might just be the rest of your life laid out in front of you – before you've even lost all of your baby teeth – was daunting, but Ackie is grateful for the game plan her parents provided. "I let my youth be led by this want to be an actor, for good and bad. Regardless of whether your parents are middle class or not, it's just not something you do easily."

There was a girl Ackie went to secondary school with who like her, was an aspiring actor. "We were both auditioning for drama school," she recalls. Ackie was accepted to the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama; her friend didn't make it. "I went up to her and was like, 'I'm so excited, I got into the drama school I really wanted!' She looked at me and she went, 'You know you only got in because you're Black, right?'" She quickly backtracked, tried to pass it off as a joke, but the mask was off. "You just don't invite that kind of hatred upon your life," Ackie continues. "I remember watching her and I was like, I'm never going to speak to you again."

For a moment, it seemed like Walthamstow hadn't changed. Earlier this summer, following the riots that began in Southport, rumours spread on social media that racist right-wing groups were planning another wave of unrest at immigration offices across the country – including the one just a few minutes away from Ackie's childhood home. "It's not easy being born in a country, but not being of that country," she says. (Her parents were raised by the Windrush generation.) "Both of those things exist at the same time, and it's quite an invisible struggle. I wouldn't change my identity for the world but sometimes I am exhausted. I'm exhausted waking up in a world that feels like you have to march through mud to get to feel at home. It's hard to battle against something when there's an opposition that constantly fuels the fire."

GQ World Culture

Living in Walthamstow as an Asian woman myself, I also feared the worst: my sister and I worked from home, locked ourselves inside our flat and vowed not to leave until the next morning. But there was no fear outside: hundreds of people marched down the high street in defiance and solidarity. Ackie saw the same images from afar, feeling prouder than ever. "It sent a shiver down my spine," she says, and for one night, there was just a little glimmer of hope. "And then we got rewarded with a Banksy!"

ACKIE DIPS A piece of crusty bread into her tomato soup while the summer sun makes way for a temporary rainstorm. Lately, she has her sights set on places far from here – last year, she was able to spend the money she had saved on a holiday, her first in six years. She and her boyfriend toured around India, Germany, France and Mexico; Thailand is next on the list.

But she may have to put the travelling on pause. In January, Joon-ho's *Mickey 17* will be released in cinemas, a surreal sci-fi about a man who is given the ability to die and regenerate. The film was another case of a director seeking her out, to her incredulous delight; Ackie was still in Whitney mode when Joon-ho requested a meeting. The pair traded ideas and stories over Zoom, before the director asked if she would read his script. "I was like, 'You're kidding me?'" A few months later, the part was hers. "It was the coolest set," Ackie continues. "Everyone was so happy to be there –" including Steven Yeun, Mark Ruffalo and Toni Collette "– because we were just like, This is the coolest director ever. We were all just so hungry to work with him."

After some long delays triggered by the 2023 actors' strike, Ackie's just as eager as the rest of the world is to find out what the *Parasite* director has been cooking. (Though, if author Ashton Edward's source material is anything to go by, it may involve slimy body horror, existential angst, and a threesome with double Robert Pattinsons.) "How do I describe Rob?" she wonders. "He's a fucking good actor. There is something that happens with him on that screen that is, like, insane."

"She was very easygoing yet dedicated," Pattinson told me, via email. "So fun and fearless as a performer, incredibly intuitive, effortlessly adaptable."

You can demarcate Ackie's career into before and after the strike. When it began, she "freaked the fuck out," she says, feeling the momentum she gained from *I Wanna Dance With Somebody* grind to a halt. "The time made me really start to think about where and why I placed so much importance on this job, and who I am, separate from it." Expectations have plagued her all her life – even now, a part of her wonders if she's any good in *Mickey 17* – but on a union-mandated break, she could be momentarily free of them. "I just became a whole different person. I spent a lot of time alone in a really good, enriching way. I travelled for the first time. I met someone. I started living an actual life, and then suddenly I was like, Hey, this isn't as important as I thought it was."

To the outside, her life has changed measurably since then: *Blink Twice* was warmly embraced; she's working with a beloved Oscar-winning director in Joon-ho; she's driving Helen Mirren around on golf carts. Does this year feel different? Does it feel important?

"I know it should, but not really," she admits. "I've detached myself from the idea of what success means now. If you asked me the same thing two years ago, I would've been like, This is my big year. This is a turning point."

Put another way, that itself is a turning point. She suffered in isolation, and came out the other side knowing she never wanted to feel that way again. Now she knows she can do the work without having to sacrifice herself in the process. "It feels like a whole new me that's coming into this next part of my career," she says. Ackie welcomes her in.

IANA MURRAY *is a freelance writer based in London.*

"I wouldn't change my identity. But I'm exhausted waking up in a world that feels like you have to march through mud to get to feel at home."

Jumper and earrings by **Bottega Veneta.**

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RICHARD GADD BARES IT ALL

With *Baby Reindeer*, Gadd turned a vulnerable, radically confessional story about surviving sexual abuse into the year's most unlikely TV hit. That, it turns out, was the easy part.

PICTURE THE EMMY: a statuette of a winged woman in gold, her back arched as she holds a colossal atom aloft. She is a symbol of the muse, of art, of the science of television; the man who designed her in 1948 used his wife as a model. She is majestic. Viewed in another way, she is two sharp prongs, eye-width apart, and a lethally heavy base. How the hell do you get three of them through security at LAX? "With great difficulty," laughs a jetlagged Richard Gadd.

He returned to London two days ago having won everything he was nominated for: Outstanding Lead Actor in a Limited Series, Outstanding Writing for a Limited Series, and – the big one – Outstanding Limited Series, for which he crept onto the stage from the back because he hadn't had time to return to his seat (he made announcer Jean Smart jump).

"Here, I'll show you a photo," Gadd says, scrolling through his camera roll to find the person least impressed with his awards: the lady at airport security. The bagged symbol of excellence is gripped in her gloved hand; her face says she could be holding a fridge sandwich from a motorway service station. Gadd snapped the picture through the security screen while he watched, hysterical, as his third trophy was siphoned off into the place your bag goes if you're about to have to explain something. He can't believe it happened. He can't believe *any of this* happened. "I wake up every morning and I am just... I think the phrase is kind of – I feel windswept?" he says. "I almost don't know. I just feel knocked off my feet."

The phenomenon that is *Baby Reindeer* began with Gadd's critically lauded one-man theatre show, a pandemic, and a mass cancellation. Its West End run was supposed to begin in the doomed days of early April 2020; Gadd was on the stage, rehearsing, when he heard that everything was shutting down. He lay on the stage's revolving floor as it spun, looking up at the ceiling: over 10 years of gigging and Edinburgh shows had led to this moment.

During lockdown, Gadd took his autobiographical play about having a stalker and turned it into a TV series – one that combined it with elements of a previous show, also autobiographical, about sexual abuse. Sitting in his new "fixer-upper" of a flat in London, he wrote what he says were "thousands" of drafts of the show that would go on to be No 1 on Netflix around the world: just him and a plastic garden chair, because all the shops that sold furniture were closed. "I remember thinking, This is the fast track to madness," he says. "I'm writing this really dark show, and I've got no soft furnishings. Nothing on the walls. I didn't have a TV. My mattress was on the floor. There was no bed frame."

Four years later, all anyone was talking about was *Baby Reindeer*, or at least it seemed that way. "I couldn't escape from it," says Gadd. "Turn on the TV, there'd be something on the TV. Turn on the radio, they'd be talking about it. I'd go to Sainsbury's – I'd be in the newspapers." Even his parents started to get doorstepped by journalists; he had to send them on an extended holiday.

In the beginning, the frenzy was about the show: this nuanced, messy, human story with no clear victim and no clear perpetrator, which explored the complexities and far-reaching radiation zone that is the aftermath of abuse. It was progressive, deeply personal and vulnerable – the kind of show that might have changed things for you, too, if you had experienced something similar. But the attention soon changed tone, and internet sleuths tracked down a theatre director they believed the show's sexually abusive TV executive was based on. (Gadd issued a statement saying they had got it wrong; the police investigated the online abuse.) Fans then turned their attention to finding the real-life Martha, the woman who becomes the stalker of Gadd's character Donny. They pinpointed 59-year-old Fiona Harvey, who appeared on *Piers Morgan Uncensored* to talk about it, before filing a £130m lawsuit against Netflix for defamation, intentional infliction of emotional distress, negligence, gross negligence and violations of her right of publicity.

Gadd cannot talk about any of this, not while the case against Netflix is pending. He cringes and apologises. He has the vibe of a man who would freely talk about anything you asked him, as deep or as personal as you wanted to go – my God, just look at his work – anywhere except here. For now, he is focusing on his new show, currently called *Lions*. A BBC lanyard pokes out from the collar of his jumper; he has a meeting there today. What can he tell me about the show? Not much, he cringes again, bound by the rules of spoilers. It's about two brothers. It's only autobiographical in the sense that everything is, in some way, drawn from life.

As for the three Emmys, he gave one to his mum (Outstanding Acting – it was she who encouraged him to audition when the school put on *Macbeth*) and one to his dad (Outstanding Writing: "He encouraged me to beaver away at the laptop"). When he arrived home to his still-unfinished flat, clutching his remaining Emmy, he found he had nowhere to put it. "I [didn't even have a] toilet or shower," he laughs. "I was like, 'Wow, the bright lights of Hollywood are pretty far away.'" —HAYLEY CAMPBELL

"I wake up every morning and I am just... windswept? I almost don't know. I feel knocked off my feet."

PHOTOGRAPH BY **KEIR LAIRD**. STYLING, KIT SWANN. PROP STYLING, DAN WILSON. TAILORING, FAYE OAKENFULL. HAIR, PAUL DONOVAN. GROOMING, PIA GARTNER.

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Shirt and suit
by **Paul Smith.**
Tie by **Prada.**

GQ World
MOTY

LOUIS PARTRIDGE ISN'T READING THE COMMENTS

In *Disclaimer*, the ascendant young actor – and internet obsession – put himself on everyone's radars. He's not letting it change his course.

LOUIS PARTRIDGE CAN barely utter the word "celebrity" without cringing. That is funny, charming and typical for the actor, who, at 21, has already worked with two Academy Award–winning directors, has 9 million Instagram followers flooding his comments with marriage proposals and Olivia Rodrigo comments, and gets stopped in the street multiple times a day. It'd be a lot for anyone, but Partridge seems pretty unfazed – driving around in his dusty VW Golf and listening to podcasts, planning his free time around playing frisbee. "I guess living at home kind of helps. I'm hardly living the high life," he says.

Having wooed audiences as the boyish, floppy-haired Lord Tewkesbury in *Enola Holmes* – "I remember being conscious of the fact I'm playing something quite close to myself," he says, talking specifically about the character's klutziness – Partridge then felt compelled to play against type, taking on different roles to prove himself as "something other than just a love interest in a Netflix thing". ("Not to diss, because I love that world. But I was keen to do a bit of somethin' else!") After switching it up to play Sex Pistols bassist Sid Vicious in Danny Boyle's *Pistol*, he most recently took another unexpected turn in Alfonso Cuarón's Apple TV+ psychological miniseries *Disclaimer*. Alongside a cast of acting legends including Cate Blanchett, Lesley Manville and Kevin Kline, Partridge is stellar as Jonathan, a young English backpacker in Italy who unwittingly becomes the centre of a decades-long web of deception, lust, scandal and revenge. It's easy to see why the series was some of the most challenging work he's done yet. "Some of the set pieces were heavy, difficult and long," he says. "I had a little less control of the character than usual. It was great in some ways, 'cause I was very much living moment to moment."

From the outside, it might look like Partridge's career has blossomed out of nowhere, but he paid his dues as an extra for seven years to get to this point. "I'd love to say that there's a big master plan. There isn't and there never will be," he says. As for the red carpets, and everything that comes with being "famous" – no matter how much he cringes – he's happy to let nature take its course. "Certainly, I don't want too much too soon," he says, smiling. "I'm hoping to do this for a long, long time. Definitely in no rush." —XUANLIN THAM

Shirt by **French Connection** from Vinted.

STYLING, ANGELO MITAKOS. TAILORING, FAYE OAKENFULL. GROOMING, BRADY LEA.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ELLIOTT MORGAN**

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AMBIKA MOD IS THE CHILL GIRL'S LEADING LADY

With her effortlessly natural performance in *One Day*, the actor has gone from an improv troupe to the lead in a smash hit on Netflix. She can still see the funny side.

IN FEBRUARY, IT felt like the nation was weeping. Within days of Netflix dropping *One Day*, fans hopped on an odd TikTok trend: filming videos of themselves sobbing over the final episodes. One person who wasn't shedding tears? Ambika Mod.

The 29-year-old actor began the year relatively unknown; besides a starring role in 2022's *This is Going to Hurt*, her background is mainly live comedy. But with *One Day*, Mod ascended to a Netflix Top 10, leading-woman status overnight. Based on the novel by David Nicholls, the series follows the studious, working-class Emma (Mod) and posh playboy Dexter (Leo Woodall), as they meet at university and then cross paths on the same day throughout their 20s and 30s, wading in and out of romantic waters.

Despite the fact that Emma and Dexter's relationship is largely set in the '80s and '90s, something about their dynamic resonated, bringing in a viewership the size of a small country. Mod's performance in particular was praised for its natural, low-key tone. She seems like a character you've actually met.

There's just one scene in the series where Mod sheds tears. "I was like, This is the only time I'm going to let Emma cry," she says. "I need the moment to really have an impact." In the scene, the pair, in their late 20s, meet for dinner. An unbearably arrogant, martini-happy Dexter – now a middling TV host – tries to show off his new taste for fine dining and name-drops ad nauseam to an unimpressed Emma. The result is an explosive fight that dredges up years of resentment. Mod's Emma is so even-keeled throughout *One Day* that her brief lapse into tears is all the more intense to watch.

"We needed to balance Dexter's arc, and he really goes through it – you can't have both of them going through it at the same time," Mod says. "I think in that scene, I had an idea of how Leo would play Dexter... so this is going to be [Emma's] moment."

She credits her organic impulses on screen to her comedy background, a mix of sketch shows, stand-up and improv. In 2024, her group, the Free Association, performed at the Edinburgh Fringe for a fourth time (post–*One Day*, their shows all sold out). "Improv made me a better writer, it made me a better performer, it made me more relaxed on stage," she says. "It made me more relaxed coming into auditions, knowing that I could just deal with anything that came out."

After seeing Mod's breakout performance in the BBC medical drama *This Is Going to Hurt*, the casting director for *One Day* chased her down to play Emma, even after she initially said no. "I had to talk myself into it," Mod says. She was born in the UK to Indian immigrants, so her casting meant new dynamics in the relationship that hadn't been present in the book. After the show's release, trolls questioned the decision to have a South Asian actor play Emma. "All that subconscious, insidious messaging that led me to turn down the role is something I continued to battle with throughout the shoot, and after it came out," she says. "It's also interesting when you're on an equal level with a straight white man, and are able to compare the treatment."

But comedy has given Mod thick skin. She describes how a woman of colour performing on stage immediately has a lot more to prove than other comics: "I've died on stage, and people being mean about me on the internet is never going to be as bad as that." After the overwhelming reaction to *One Day*, don't expect her to shed any tears over it.—REBECCA DOLAN

Top and gloves by **Moonray.** Dress by **Self-Portrait.**

STYLING, TANIA FADTE.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **SULEIKA MUELLER**

FONTAINES DC'S NEW ROMANTICISM

The riotous Irish band – fans include Paul Mescal, Cillian Murphy,and Harry Styles – owned this summer by doing something nobody expected: softening up.

WHEN FONTAINES DC released their fourth album, *Romance*, in August, the band braced themselves. Until then they had gone along with their music being labelled "postpunk", and taking their label's advice to favour the yappier single releases for their other albums, *Dogrel* (2019), *A Hero's Death* (2020) and *Skinty Fia* (2022). "I'd be lying if I said it didn't affect me, insofar as it made me want to prove that we weren't that," frontman Grian Chatten told *GQ* at the time. "With each record we've said, 'There's no way they can call this a punk record or a postpunk record,' and they always fucking do."

But this time they were sitting on something new, and they didn't know how it would go down. To make *Romance* they brought on board James Ford, the producer behind the Arctic Monkeys seismic direction-change album, *AM*, who encouraged them to turn down the volume and let their music's more emotional textures be heard. The result is a wild, expansive record that is difficult to hold in your head all at once. There is the panic attack–inspired "Starburster", which has a throbbing that makes it feels like the walls are closing in. But there's also the soaring, Lana Del Rey–esque romantic grandeur of "In The Modern World" which splits the record wide open.

They needn't have worried. Fontaines DC – the initials stand for Dublin City, where the five of them met at music college – stole the summer, with a seismic wave carrying the band from cult status to something bigger. The band's Glastonbury set was a packed-out, unanimously agreed highlight. A few weeks later, Fred Again headlined Reading wearing *Romance* merch. On the eve of the album's release they played a last-minute show at the Electric Ballroom in Camden, with Harry Styles and Cillian Murphy looking on.

The new sound arrived alongside the band's freaky new sense of style: a riot of animal print, gelled hair, Adidas tracksuits and green and pink sunglasses. Call it Rat Summer, call it the summer of *Romance*, but Fontaines made themselves heard with arguably their quietest record yet. "We really stood out of its way and allowed it to happen," says Chatten. "That's four albums' worth of growing confidence."—OLIVIA OVENDEN

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KIT HARINGTON'S INDUSTRIOUS RETURN

With starring roles in both *Industry* and *Slave Play*, the actor has hard-launched an era of risk-taking.

A KIT HARINGTON fight scene used to involve dragons and ice zombies; in 2024, it was a tumble with Harry Lawtey in a children's soft play area.

In the new season of sex, drugs and banking hit *Industry*, the former *Game of Thrones* actor plays troubled entrepreneur Henry, who is stuck in a love-hate relationship with Lawtey's finance graduate Robert. Their slapstick altercation in the second episode of the third series became an instant meme among fans of the show. It was also what convinced Harington to take the part. "I read that scene and it made me think, I've got to do this," the 37-year-old says, "and it was great, because I instantly clicked with Harry. We had a kind of – I hate the word – bromance. I said to him, [Robert] is the closest this thing has to a hero, to a good soul, a bit like Jon Snow. It was fun playing the tormentor."

Despite Henry's landed privilege and casual cruelty, Harington brought a vulnerability to the character that elevated him and, in turn, the show, which took an even more excessive and frenetic direction this third season. "Henry's got a real arc. That was the thing I was keen on," Harington says of his character's plotline, which also included the much-discussed golden shower scene. "You think you know this guy, and then you hear the story about a significant trauma in his past. It doesn't make what he's doing better, it just makes you understand it. [The writers] flip it on its head beautifully."

Harington also starred in the West End run of *Slave Play*, fellow MOTY honouree Jeremy O Harris' satire about racism, sexual desire and the murky places those two forces overlap. As Jim, an uptight Englishman struggling to understand his Black partner's sexual fantasies, Harington's reviews were fantastic; another gamble that paid off. "I have an unwritten rule not to go three years without being on stage," he says. "And *Slave Play* is unique to anything I've done before. It made me feel things reading it – which not all plays do, at least not on the page – including some quite ugly things."

Season four of *Industry* has been greenlit, so while some of Harington's future seems assured, he says, "I want to work on odd, strange, challenging material," he says. "I've never had a plan. I'm very much like, 'What's on the table?' and go with my gut." —SAM PARKER

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Trousers by **Paul Smith.**
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Ring, his own.

GQ World MOTY

STYLING, ANGELO MITAKOS. TAILORING, FAYE OAKENFULL. GROOMING, PAUL DONOVAN.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **DANNY LOWE**

ARMANDO IANNUCCI IS TIRED OF YOUR *VEEP* COMPARISONS

The acerbic genius behind *The Thick of It*, and now HBO's *The Franchise*, is used to political satire forecasting the real world. It's less funny in an election year.

LITTLE-KNOWN STORY: Armando Iannucci was nearly a civil servant. He even sat the entrance exam. "I was given all sorts of scenarios, you know: how would you deal with this?" Iannucci explains over breakfast, in the same Fitzrovia café he's been coming to for the last 30 years. He was rejected, though, because the bureaucrats didn't think he'd take it seriously. Thankfully for us, he's been taking serious subjects unseriously ever since. While other showrunners hit the big-time with once-in-a-generation hits they never quite match, Iannucci has spent the last three decades quietly reinventing comedy on the regular: *The Day Today*, *Alan Partridge*, *The Thick of It*, *Veep*. His latest sees him overseeing HBO's *The Franchise*, a satire set in the world of superhero movie-making, while also re-teaming with Steve Coogan for a stage adaptation of Stanley Kubrick's black-comedy classic *Dr Strangelove*.

With wars in Europe and the Middle East, a black-comedy play about nuclear annihilation is worryingly timely...
I know. When we started writing it, we thought it would be a perfect metaphor for impending climate catastrophe, you know, something approaching us that could kill us all. Now, it is about NATO and Russia, what happens if these two powers make an error; no subtext required! But in [Kubrick's] film, we don't see the Soviet leader, it's implied he's drunk all the time. Here he's rather menacing and dangerous and chilling.

In the film, a rogue general has decided fluoridisation of water is a Commie plot to destroy America – that almost seems like a mild conspiracy theory these days.
I know – theories about Bill Gates putting software in the vaccine, 5G towers, politicians talking about eating cats and dogs... it's crazy people, but that's normal now. On the one hand it's really depressing. On the other hand, it's great for us.

Coogan is doing one better than Peter Sellers – who played three roles in Kubrick's 1964 original – by playing four on stage. Didn't anyone try to talk him out of it?
I mean, I think he's trying to talk himself out of it right now!

You've also produced *The Franchise*, a sitcom about a crew making a superhero film. How did that come about?
It came from a lunch with [director] Sam Mendes. He'd come off the back of two Bond films and had all these stories about what it's like being a respected director in the middle of a bigger machine. I just happened to say, "Well, there's a comedy right there."

One character in the first episode says, "Are we killing cinema?" Are you with Scorsese on this subject? Are superhero franchises hurting the industry?
I'm not, no. I really enjoyed the early films. The ones that have a distinctive voice, like *Thor: Ragnarok*. Then you had to watch a series on Disney+ for them to make any sense, and I thought, Now you're just taking the piss... so I haven't seen any in the last two or three years at all.

All your comedies draw on a lot of research – what in *The Franchise* came from real life?
Well, that a production had a special effects thing that did burn someone's eyes... albeit temporarily. But also, when we were shooting *Avenue 5* and just wanted an actor for two days, we'd often be told they were in a room in Shepperton for three months covered in green, shouting at nonexistent monsters. You know, and they'd be the best actor of their generation.

You've been working on a film about social media for a while – is there an Elon Musk–like protagonist?
No, it's about the people who are now coming and going, "We're going to keep it small, we're not selling your data." And the problem is always that once it becomes big, it gets taken out of your control. You see it with the Telegram story now – you have anonymity, but with that comes the opportunity for exchanging child pornography and money-laundering.

You're critical of X, but you're still hanging on in there...
I mean, I have my bag packed at the door, ready to leave. You know, Musk is someone who is saying something doesn't have to be accurate to be valid, as long as it gets coverage or clicks. And that's infected politics. Politicians now behave like people on social media. If you say something, they just say it's bollocks; they don't want to hear it. The obvious one is Nigel Farage, who starts saying the [*Question Time*] audience is fixed. But you see it in Starmer's team too – they're very particular with who can ask questions.

You left *Veep* just before Trump announced his candidacy in 2015. It feels like the comedy from that show and *The Thick of It* both rely on a sense of shame that no longer exists.
Yeah, they would have to be different [if made today]. Because you're right, it works on: something's gone a bit wrong, you try to backtrack before everyone finds out. And implied there is that there are a set of

"Politicians now behave like people on social media. If you say something, they just say it's bollocks."

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CAMERA PRESS/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/U.

rules. But now: there are no rules. I mean, you've got Kamala Harris, with policies and arguments, and you've got Trump talking about eating dogs. I mean, why are they close?

Could you see yourself doing a show set in politics again?
Oh, absolutely, but you know, the idea comes when it comes. It's not like I would sit down and go, 'OK, I want to do something about Keir Starmer...'

You once pitched a movie about Trump as a joke – where he'd be taken to a fake White House to serve a fake term and not bother anyone in the process – but which ended up getting real offers, didn't it?
I got 12 offers! It happened during the Toronto film festival. I think there was that panic of: have we missed the good idea? Even HBO said, "We'll do it if no one else will."

You weren't a little tempted?
I didn't want to do it. I did talk to a reputable director, but while Trump was president I didn't want to spend 18 months in his company, to have him in my head. Which isn't to say I wouldn't do a Trump thing at some point.

Do you get a bit tired with the *Veep*-Harris comparisons? There aren't a lot of direct parallels, beyond a female vice-president thrust towards the presidency...
When we made it, we didn't know who Kamala Harris was. We just didn't want people saying, "Is it Dick Cheney; is it Al Gore?" So we had a female vice president. And of course, when it started, the question was, "Is it Hillary Clinton; is it Sarah Palin?" No, it's Selina Meyer. I'd sort of forgotten [about the parallels] until it was all over TikTok. Of course, for it to continue, Biden will have to resign on ill health and then it'll have to be an electoral college tie...

How do you feel about comedy in general? Jerry Seinfeld recently said the extreme-left is ruining comedy as they're so concerned with offence. [He has since retracted this statement.]
There's nothing wrong with being offended. Maybe the humourless proportion is on the rise. One thing I have noticed is, if I make a joke about Suella Braverman, that's fine. But if I make a joke about something Wes Streeting said, it'll be, "I thought you were on our side!" It's a joke! If you can't take a joke, then maybe your views are not that firmly held together. —STUART McGURK

All clothing, his own.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **LUDOVIC CARÈME**

GQ World MOTY

RAPMAN REASSEMBLES THE SUPERHERO HIT

With the MCU exhausted and other comic-book franchises in the doldrums, the creator of Netflix hit *Supacell* is proving that fresh stories and perspectives are still out there.

SUPERHEROES HAVE CHANGED. The faltering Marvel universe, with its buff, infallibly moral protagonists, has given way to shows like *Invincible* and *The Boys*, which reimagine the heroes as narcissistic sociopaths. The Netflix hit *Supacell* takes this even further, asking: what if superheroes weren't perfect or crazy, what if they were just... normal? Moreover, what if they were from Peckham?

"What makes the show is that we're not trying to cater to [an] audience; we're making an authentic show, set in south London," explains *Supacell*'s creator and showrunner, Andrew Onwubolu, better known as Rapman. It worked: *Supacell* became a global No 1 on Netflix, and in August was confirmed to be returning for a second season.

Rapman first caught the TV industry's attention in 2018 with the acclaimed YouTube series *Shiro's Story*, made for just £3,000. After that, he got a call from Jay-Z, who signed him to Roc Nation. Next came feature film *Blue Story*, a gangland story loosely based on his experiences attending Sacred Heart Catholic School in Camberwell. *Supacell* came with a much larger budget, and a lot of added pressure. If *Supacell* were to fail, he told me, "you're not going to see another show with an all-Black cast and a budget like this for a very, very long time."

Still, there were times when Netflix thought that Rapman's writing was too hyperlocal for a US audience. "We did a lot of automated dialogue replacement with the characters [because] they believed the slang was too much, the accent too strong," he says. This seemed strange to Rapman, who was a big fan of *The Wire* and enjoyed its Baltimore vernacular even when he didn't always understand it. (He says Netflix told him no one in the US would know what a DBS check is. He put his foot down.)

"Netflix don't pretend to be the BBC," he says. "They find people who've got creative ideas and they just support that person... so anything you love in *Supacell*, all me. Anything you hate in *Supacell*, all me!"

Writing the second season, Rapman still harbours an innocent glee at the fact that he can wake up wanting Michael, the show's time-travelling delivery driver protagonist, to fly, "and that's it: Michael flies". I ask about the risk that comes with authoring a hit show. Fans can be brutal. "You have to believe in yourself," he says.

He says he already knows how season two begins and ends, and he's enjoyed brainstorming new superpowers with his son. "The stakes are going to get higher, put it that way," he says. "I'm not going to put everything into season two out of fear that we won't get season three... *Supacell* will go on for a long time."

Supacell's twist is revealed at the end of season one. The characters' powers come from a mutation of sickle cell disease, a blood disorder that disproportionately affects Black people. The idea was motivated by the George Floyd protests in London; Rapman wanted to take a position of weakness and transform it into a position of strength. After the show came out, he flew to Atlanta to receive an award for raising sickle cell awareness. "There were queues and queues of people in line to talk to me and tell me how they feel about the show," he reflects, "it was really touching. I didn't know it would mean so much." —MILES ELLINGHAM

Jacket and shirt by **Dior Men.**

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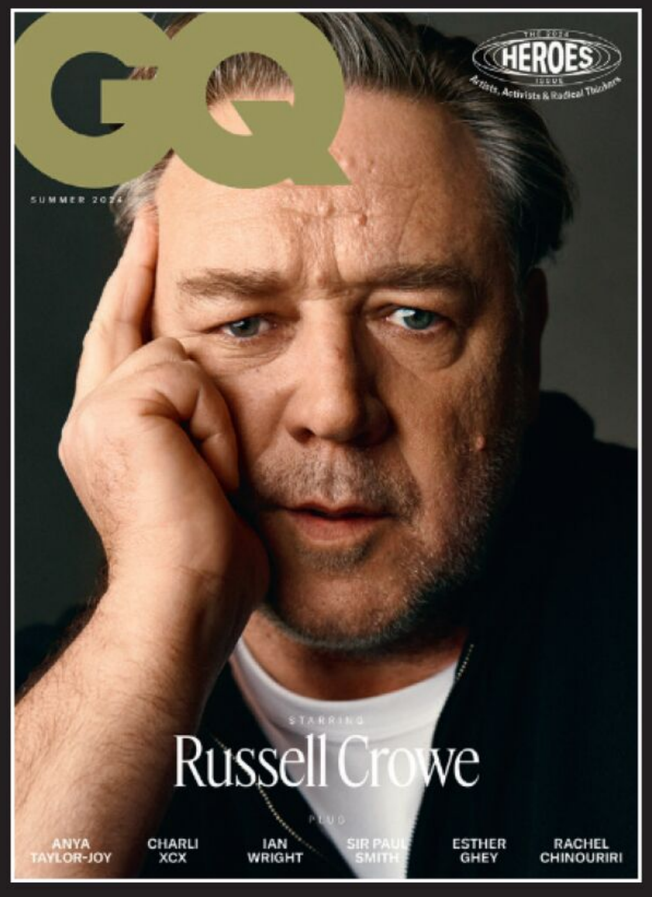

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GQ World MOTY

SLAWN'S ART WORLD INSURGENCY

Luxury brands, mega-galleries and celebrity collectors are fighting for a piece of the cult Nigerian artist. True to form, he doesn't really care.

SLAWN DOES NOT consider himself a contentious person. "I don't aspire to be controversial," the artist tells me from his Caledonian Road studio, where he is working on a monumental bronze sculpture he intends to install somewhere in his native Nigeria (he won't say where, because he doesn't know yet). "I just do whatever the fuck I want." An idea will come to him, Slawn explains, and he'll execute it on impulse: the reaction of others isn't really a concern. "I'm like, 'I want to make a big ballsack and fucking post it on Instagram.' People are like, 'Oh, you're trying to be controversial.' No I'm not. I just wanted to make a big ballsack."

Follow his logic or not, Slawn is undeniably the most talked-about young artist in the UK: an art-world outlaw for the ages. Since erupting onto the scene in 2021, in a Virgil Abloh–endorsed flurry of spray-painted phallic imagery and stylised cartoon-like figures, Slawn has behaved as though he was ticking his way down a list headed "Major Tastemakers". He has collaborated with Skepta and Central Cee; his collectors include A$AP Rocky, Reece James and Tremaine Emory. Stories abound of would-be buyers physically fighting in his studio for the right to buy a piece of his, of people offering to pay for canvases with cocaine. Slawn spray-painted a car, a London bus, an aeroplane. He painted the rapper Rubi Rose. He designed the 2023 Brit Award, then created *Ugly Bastard*, an alter-ego-cum-avatar in the vein of Kaws' Companion or Shepard Fairey's Obey Giant. In 2024 alone, he's dropped collabs with Rolex, Wingstop and Louis Vuitton. Nobody else strides between fashion and art so effortlessly.

You can imagine it's been a riot. And yet in August, Slawn's second son was born. His Instagram feed, once all house parties and gallery openings, is now punctuated with pictures of bath time. Is he raving like he used to? "No. If I'm having a party, it's in my house or my friend's house. We just stay indoors." What does he do for pleasure? "Noodles, bro. Hella noodles." He even plans to swear off Instagram – a bold move, given the platform is his most powerful marketing tool – as soon as his son is old enough to google. "Give me a couple of years, man, I'll be gone. You can't be on the internet when your kid knows how to use the internet." This is the new, second-chapter Slawn: barely 24, and mellowing.

Slawn has told past interlocutors that he feels like a "scam artist" (which word you put the emphasis on is up to you). And it's true that his story – his personality – can often seem more important than his art; you can read entire profiles of Slawn and never see the work mentioned once.

What we do know is this: born Olaolu Akeredolu-Ale in Nigeria in 2000, Slawn was an established figure in Lagos' tiny skateboarding scene by his mid-teens. At 15, he was working at Wafflesncream, a local skate shop established by Jomi Marcus-Bello. Slawn became its creative director, then founded his own label, Motherlan, with two friends. He moved to London in 2017 to study graphic design, but it was during lockdown that, stuck in a flatshare of 10 people in Old Street, he turned to painting. Something clicked. People began buying his canvases; the network effect worked its magic (he is now represented by Efie Gallery, a Dubai-based gallery specialising in African artists).

Slawn talks repeatedly about how people in the art world don't like his success, which is news to me – his *art naïf* work is like manna to the kingmakers of Mayfair and Fitzrovia, and when we talk, he's midway through a solo exhibition at the Saatchi Yates Gallery. But Slawn is not part of that world, he insists: art just happened to work for him. "I stumbled on art," he explains, "but my career is by design." Later, he tells me that "maybe 30 per cent" of his income comes from selling art. The rest is all partnerships, investments, and income from BeauBeaus, the Shoreditch café he opened with his partner Tallula Christie in 2023.

If this all sounds like angst, know that it isn't – it's something more like ease. Slawn uses the analogy of a club. "I'm not trying to hate from outside the club," he says. "I'm not even trying to get in the club. I'm waiting for my friends to come outside, so I can go back home and eat." —THOMAS BARRIE

All clothing and jewellery, his own.

STYLING, ITUNU OKE.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **JAMES PEARSON-HOWES**

GQ World
MOTY

ADAM PEATY HAS NEVER BEEN PROUDER

When Peaty came second in the 100m breaststroke final this summer, it looked like a defeat. But after what he overcame to get there, it might be his greatest achievement of all.

"I DON'T WANT to drop my kecks on camera but I've got a big tiger on my leg now," says Adam Peaty, with the electric, triple-gold-medallist energy that's lit up every Olympic Games since he burst onto the swimming scene a decade ago. "I'm taking the opportunity to get as many tattoos done as I can while I'm not in the water."

Five months have now passed since Peaty came impossibly shy of winning the 100m breaststroke gold in Paris – enough time to suggest his next tattoo could be "0.02", right? "Fuck that," he laughs. "Don't rub it in."

When Italian Nicolò Martinenghi touched the sensor *two hundredths of a second* ahead of Peaty inside a rowdy La Défense Arena – one of many Parisian landmarks that were temporarily transformed to host feats of epic athleticism this summer – the narrative of winning shifted, maybe forever.

"It's a good message for everyone that you don't have to win to succeed – because I've won all my life. We, as a nation, always get excited about the medals, the golds, silvers and bronzes, but the biggest thing people should take away is the adversity of the challenge," says Peaty, who since Tokyo 2020 has suffered from depression, had problems with alcohol and was diagnosed with ADHD. "This year was a very different one – to go from a place of being broken and hating what I did every single day to a place where I could still be on the podium and celebrating such an enormous race was huge. For me, winning silver has more teaching moments and potentially more things in the future that are going to pay a dividend," he adds.

To share that moment in front of all his loved ones – his son George, fiancée Holly Ramsay, and longtime coach Mel Marshall, among others – goes a long way to explain the emotion he showed after the race. "Those happy tears were, I'm at the Olympic Games, I'm performing the best I can, my family's in the crowd, and the people with GB flags, and all the people that have been on that journey the whole way. When I saw George, I was like, There's no way I'm holding this back. I was like, Just let it open," he says.

Fatherhood (his son is now four) has got him into crying more. "We're in the back garden playing with Nerf guns and George goes, 'Daddy, you're my best friend.' It's like Will Ferrell in *Daddy's Home* who cries at everything. I'm pretty much like that. But they're always good tears."

What the future holds for Peaty as he turns 30 depends entirely on whether the 50m breaststroke (he's the current world record holder) is added to the Olympic lineup for LA in 2028. "But it's no longer a selfish 'me' decision," he says. "It's a decision Holly, George and my team will have to understand."

Peaty explains that he lives by a saying: "If you can cry, you let your soul breathe". He feels the tenet has enabled him to communicate to the world that behind every athlete there's a human being. "Mel said that [the Paris final] was her favourite race, because it showed my true personality and my true emotion, instead of this hard-as-nails image of me," he says. "Going through any adversity now, I know I could overcome it. I'm proud of myself for that." —MIKE CHRISTENSEN

Jacket, T-shirt and trousers by **Prada.** Watch by **Cartier.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY **JAMIE SALMONS**

GQ World
MOTY

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PHOTOGRAPH BY **BRAD OGBONNA**

STEVE McQUEEN'S PRIORITY IS THE PICTURE

In an ailing Hollywood, the Oscar-winning director has proved himself to be one of the few arthouse filmmakers to regularly turn a profit. But it isn't money that concerns him; it's legacy.

IN 2003, STEVE MCQUEEN spent six days with British soldiers in Basra, Iraq, intending to make a film about their experience for the Imperial War Museum. The project changed course – instead, the artist and director made the artwork *Queen and Country* (2007): 155 sheets of postage stamps each bearing the face of a fallen soldier. But the conflict he had witnessed, and the ordinary people embroiled in it – how they bonded, a collage of clashing accents and cultures – stayed on his mind. "All of these guys from different parts of the country coming together was kind of beautiful," he recalls.

That thought persisted for so long that, 21 years later, it inspired *Blitz*, his new film about a nine-year-old evacuee navigating his way home through the treacherous streets of London during the Second World War. *Blitz* challenges the whitewashed perception of what the war effort looked like on home soil. During his research for his 2020 miniseries *Small Axe*, about the lives of West Indian immigrants in the UK in the 20th century, "I came across this image of this young Black child with an over-large coat and oversized suitcase, standing on a platform ready to be evacuated," McQueen says. "That was when the light went off in my head." George, played by newcomer Elliot Heffernan, is mixed race; his mother, played by Saoirse Ronan, is white. The people George encounters on his homeward journey are reflective of the communities who lived in London at that time, but are seldom shown in the films about the period: African-Caribbean, Sikh and Chinese.

This has long been a trait of McQueen's filmmaking: turning the camera ever so slightly to see what's sat just out of frame. In *Hunger*, he pondered the isolated final weeks of the Irish independence activist Bobby Sands. *Grenfell*, a video installation that screened last year at London's Serpentine Galleries, was composed entirely of drone footage of the titular tower block shortly after the fire that destroyed it in 2017. *Occupied City*, his 2023 documentary about life in Amsterdam under Nazi occupation, painstakingly broke down the details of those who were murdered by the regime, street-by-street, over contemporary footage of a city at risk of forgetting it.

But McQueen is not a lecturer, and he grimaces at the idea of his films serving that purpose. "I don't really do messages," he says. "As far as the film is concerned, you want to entertain and engage, and if you can entertain people, that means you can engage them". His subject matters – imprisonment, sex addiction, slavery – are often contentious, and yet every one of his fictional films so far has turned a profit. *12 Years a Slave*, his £15 million-budget Oscar-winner has, by McQueen's estimate, made close to a quarter of a billion dollars if you include home entertainment sales. But "if I was into [money], I'd go to Wall Street," he says. "I just want to be able to make the things that I want to make."

Blitz is his first film to be funded through a streamer, Apple Original Films, following in the footsteps of Martin Scorsese and Ridley Scott. McQueen says these studios are "in their infant stage... with bumps in the road," but that they've built "a great relationship". As budgets crunch and IP-driven filmmaking starts to soak up studio cashflows, even directors of his stature are finding it harder to make the films they want. "It's never going to be easy," he says. "I think the problem now is that [studios] are more risk averse. Would I be able to make *Hunger* now? Would I be able to make *Shame*? There's less and less trust in filmmakers. If there's no support [for new talent], you don't get great artists. The only way for cinema to survive is for young people to get their hands on cameras." That is something he thinks about: who will break through in the years to come? In the UK, "there's hardly any Black filmmakers," he says. "Any. That's troubling."

It's a hurdle McQueen remembers having to conquer himself. His Trinidadian mother and Grenadian father moved to west London in the wake of the Blitz, and like most young Black boys, McQueen's ambitions were nearly quashed in a school system that, in the words of a more recent headteacher at his high school, was institutionally racist. Little interest was expressed in his artistic inclinations. Dyslexic and with a lazy eye, he was pointed towards manual jobs, only finding his escape route when he studied art at college, attending Goldsmiths and, briefly, Tisch School of the Arts in New York. He won the Turner Prize in 1999. In 2014, *12 Years a Slave* made him the first Black filmmaker to win the Oscar for Best Picture.

That journey means he's not prone to compromise. This filters into his conversation: McQueen skirts emotional platitudes. He will not fill a silence he doesn't want to. Some might assume that makes him difficult; if anything, it's a reflection of how he's learned to speak intentionally, aware that – when your voice is one that's rarely heard – when you do speak, someone is always listening.

He lives in Amsterdam now, where "people ignore you and they're not really interested, which is fantastic", and the culture of cinema feels like it lives in younger, more nimble hands. He has faith in the fact that they will keep the artform alive. "I don't want dust on my pictures," he says.

Having never made a feature film set in contemporary London, he says his next project will finally take him there. He's been speaking to Denzel Washington about what they could do together. *Blitz*'s release, how it performs, doesn't seem to be on his mind. That he's made it here is good enough: "I survived."

—DOUGLAS GREENWOOD

> "The only way for cinema to survive is for young people to get their hands on cameras."

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Picture by Alessandro Bergamini

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NIA ARCHIVES' NEW CLUB CLASSICS

The rising star's communal junglist spirit is revolutionising the UK's underground music scene, one breakbeat at a time.

IT'S DIFFICULT FOR Nia Archives to decide on one highlight of 2024, the year when it felt like things were really changing. Was it raving at Notting Hill Carnival to her euphoric samba-infused anthem, "Baianá"? Was it at Glastonbury, when she was perched atop a giant inflatable set of grills like a queen on her throne? Was it performing to thousands at Sonic Mania in Tokyo, having played in the city the year before to only 200 people?

Or perhaps it was during her Boiler Room set in Nottingham that Archives felt she was most in her element. "The club night was for women and nonbinary folk," she explains from her studio near London Fields. She was rocking an outfit that was "very on brand" for her: CP Company jeans with a T-shirt that read "Emotional Junglist", a phrase she coined and often uses on her Instagram posts. Archives was brought on stage by internet personality and Nottingham icon Charity Shop Sue. ("She's a legend. I don't really get star struck but when I met her, I was. A bit of a fever dream, to be honest.") The energy? Unmatched – and a representation of the inclusive club revival that Archives has championed.

Since her bedroom-start breakthrough in 2020, Archives, 25 – a DJ, producer, singer and songwriter – has emerged as a singular genre-defying force at the forefront of the UK's dance music scene. Her sound fuses blissful breaks with guitar-powered tunes, punkish Britpop lyrics with jungle beats. "I like that kind of contrast between happy and sad – that's kind of where I want my music to exist," she says. She's already known for her cool, diversity-focused club nights, and her debut album *Silence is Loud*, released in April, sent even more fans queueing for her inevitably sold-out dance floors.

At her core, Archives is still a junglist. "I'd always heard it when I was a kid, because I'm half Jamaican," she says. "I guess I heard it at Bradford Carnival every year – they'd always play jungle. It's just a sound that I'd heard my whole life, but I didn't know what it was or the culture and the history." Jungle, the fusion of reggae sound-system culture and electronic dance music that dominated the UK's smoke-filled '90s club scene, became the foundation for drum'n' bass, garage and grime. But Archives is the first to point out that she's not a jungle revivalist, because the scene never really went away.

Archives has always found stability in music. As a child, she sang gospel at church with her nana, who ran a pirate radio station in Bradford and had a sound system that exposed Archives to everything from jungle to soul and R&B. She started making music when she moved to Manchester on her own at 16, and pursued music production once she moved to London. In 2023, she opened for Beyoncé, and she has remixed tracks for the likes of Jorja Smith and Fred Again. "Some people like my remixes, some people hate them," Archives says. "They're a bit like Marmite, but I just have fun while I make them."

Nightclubs have only recently begun booming again since the pandemic, when illegal raves took over. Now, with venues capturing the spirit of bratty nonchalance that defines the current pop-cultural aesthetic, it seems like the movement has gone mainstream. "*Brat* was definitely a fucking cultural takeover. It was amazing to see the dance music in the pop space," Archives says. "All that crossover shines a light on underground artists as well."

Which brings us back to the Boiler Room gig, and the spirit of togetherness that, for a time, seemed focused in that one room. "Diversity just makes things way more interesting. My audience is really mixed – ages, genders, sexualities – and that should be celebrated," says Archives. "I want to create spaces where people feel like they can exist comfortably and have fun without worrying about how they're perceived, or whatever. It shouldn't really be about that. It's about the music." —ZINYA SALFITI

GQ World MOTY

All clothing, her own.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **I FUCK TOKYO**

GQ World MOTY

ALFIE HEWETT'S HUGE SERVE

With two new Wimbledon titles and a gold and silver at the Paris Olympics, the British wheelchair tennis star is close to achieving his dream of completing the game.

WHEN ALFIE HEWETT hit the winning shot at Wimbledon this year – a thumping backhand of serve as clean as it was unreturnable – he became the second male player in history to win all four tennis Grand Slams in both singles and doubles. "I must have thought about Wimbledon every single day from the moment I lost the final last year," he says. "You lose a singles final one time: it hurts, but you're happy you made a final. You lose it twice in a row – that's even more scar tissue. This time, going in, I'd almost have been happier losing in the semi-final than another final."

Hewett's SW19 dream came true at the third time of asking. But what looked, to an elated Centre Court crowd, like a straightforward 6-2, 6-3 win against Spaniard Martin de la Puente was anything but – as only a home-grown player on the famous grass would know. "It's the first time I've ever felt nerves so strong that I thought I was going to throw up," he says. "I was a nervous wreck, but deep down, from the moment I played my first point that week, I wasn't leaving any of those courts a beaten man."

The win was made more remarkable by the fact he returned to Court One later that day to win yet another doubles championship with Gordon Reid. In between, Hewett tasked his partner, Lily, with herding friends and family outside for 10 minutes of celebrations. "That's one of the most special moments from that day," he says. "That embrace with everyone who had been on that journey, feeling every emotion with me, every point, every year. It was nice to be able to send them home happy this time."

At 26, Hewett already has 30 Grand Slams to his name (Novak Djokovic has 24). But how to follow that win, having completed his greatest career goal of completing the singles and doubles Slams? "I was a little lost for a few weeks," he admits. "As I was getting closer to it, and it became more realistic, it was probably an unhealthy obsession. Coming out of it, you're like, What now?"

Short answer: two Paralympics medals a month later. At Paris 2024, Hewett and Reid completed the doubles Golden Slam, adding the gold to their trophy cabinet. The achievement isn't lost on Hewett, even if having to settle for silver in singles the next day was "a tough pill to swallow". But given he will only be 30 at LA 2028, at least he's saved himself one more title to keep him hungry – he'll be putting everything into claiming Paralympics singles gold to become the first male player to complete both Golden Slams. It's the Alfie Hewett way. —DAVID TAYLOR

All clothing, his own.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **JAMIE SALMONS**

AG COOK IS MORE THAN *BRAT*

GQ World MOTY

Having produced the album of the summer and released his own acclaimed solo project, *Britpop*, the PC Music founder is bringing club music back to the charts – and pop is finally catching up.

AG COOK WAS hiding in a small town in Montana (population 7,000) when he realised he had helped shape the global pop culture phenomenon of the year. It's his partner's hometown, and about as musically off-grid as one can get. "That place doesn't care at all about any extended cool pop universe, but I noticed kids had painted their nails green or they were playing *Brat* on the jukebox," recalls the musician and producer. "A few weeks in, *Brat* was multi-generational – the shopkeeper knew about it. That was how I knew it was genuinely mainstream."

Cook's career has been inextricably linked with that of his friend Charli XCX – he has produced much of XCX's work, and acted as her official creative director since 2016. She saw genius in him for good reason: in 2013 he founded PC Music, the London-based label that essentially invented the hyperpop genre. "I'm very happy with it but it's not unexpected," he says jovially, of their shared success. "I've always thought Charli is that superstar."

As a producer, Cook's USP is simple: he makes cool people cooler. In the last three years, he's worked with Caroline Polachek, Troye Sivan and even Beyoncé, with whom he co-wrote and produced 2022's "All Up in Your Mind" from Grammy-nominated *Renaissance*. His equally inventive solo output – his latest album, *Britpop*, was released just weeks before *Brat* – puts Cook firmly in the Jack Antonoff category of zeitgeist-shaping producer as well as a respected musician in his own right.

With his round glasses and late-era John Lennon hair, Cook has long felt like a cryptic pop mastermind, operating on music's fringes. One side effect of *Brat* is he is recognised more in public now – thankfully, he says, only by music obsessives like him. "I'm not sure how interested I am in truly being a public figure outside of the craft of it all," he admits. "I feel like I have a lot to say about the art form itself."

In that vein, he is delighted to be honoured by *GQ*. "I'm sad that there is less and less space for journalism," he says. To promote *Britpop*, he created a music website called Witchfork, a play on industry bible Pitchfork. "I paid journalists and wrote pieces myself. I want more discourse that isn't purely led by social media."

Enjoy this glimpse of Cook now – next year he may disappear again. "I remember when you wouldn't hear from someone until it was their campaign, and that was their entire existence," he says wistfully. Even so, his mission to make pop braver and more interesting will never stop. "I take it quite seriously as an art form," he says. "And if you're interacting with something as bizarre as a music industry and trying to make genuinely moving projects, you have to fight for them to not be the boring version." —HANNAH EWENS

All clothing, his own.

STYLING, JOSH KOHNO AND SOFIA CASTILLO.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **SINNA NASSERI**

virgin atlantic

fly at your own altitude

All clothing, his own

GQ World MOTY

MARCO CAPALDO'S NORTH STAR

The designer behind 16Arlington won over the London party-girl crowd. Now flirting with menswear, Capaldo is taking it all back to where it began.

THERE'S SOMETHING OF a formula when it comes to launching a buzzy fashion brand in the UK: first, carefully craft your brand DNA; next, put on small, hype-generating runway shows. Then will come commercial backing, stockists and press attention.

But Marco Capaldo was never really interested in doing things the normal way. When he and his girlfriend, Federica "Kikka" Cavenati founded their own brand at 16 Arlington Street, a cul-de-sac just off London's Piccadilly, everything came backwards: the Benjamin Button of fashion labels. Fashion students Capaldo and Cavenati had started making things around 2017 – pretty party pieces, feathered dresses, tops covered in sequins – and were discovered by the fashion crowd before a big runway show ever crossed their minds. When other brands would be finding their way, 16Arlington was already being stocked in the likes of Barneys in New York, Net-a-Porter and Moda Operandi, with stylists and clients in hot pursuit.

"It was Kikka and I. We were doing the production, the samples, the PR, the lot," Capaldo says. "Our studio was in our home, and it kind of became this rolling conveyor belt of friends and family popping in, taking samples, taking them away, coming back the next day with people they've been out with saying, 'Can we order this?'"

Suddenly, every cool girl worth her dirty martini wanted 16Arlington pieces for their nights out. Celebrity clients flocked: Amal Clooney, Jorja Smith, Christina Aguilera.

Then, in 2021, tragedy struck the way that tragedy always does: quickly and cruelly. Cavenati passed away after a sudden illness at the age of 28. "I feel it daily," says Capaldo, "Kikka is a north star in everything we do… and that intensifies the highs, and it also intensifies the lows."

Capaldo has followed that north star faithfully in the years since. Cavenati's love of glamour and attention to detail is embedded in the brand, and all of its big moments still shine with her fingerprints. There have been plenty of them, too: fashion shows; celebrity dressing; the brand's first Met Gala this May, dressing WNBA basketball revelation Angel Reese; and, yes, menswear. The brand introduced menswear into its AW23 collection, all well-cut trousers and tops worthy of big nights out – the 16Arlington party girl finally finding her match.

Things may have started off a little back-to-front, but maybe, that was all part of the plan. "When Kikka and I first started, we took three A3 sheets of paper and created a dream list," Capaldo says. The pair scrawled their blue-sky visions, hopes shimmering like a highway mirage: an Italian *Vogue* cover for their home country, this red carpet, that celebrity. Capaldo, a self-described type-A personality, filed the papers away.

Until: "I stumbled across them not so long ago. It's amazing looking back now, nearly six years later, at how many of those things we ticked off. You know, there's a beauty in accepting that things do go wrong, but also… things do go right."

—MAHALIA CHANG

PHOTOGRAPH BY **HUGO COMTE**

GQ World
MOTY

JEREMY O HARRIS TAKES CENTRE STAGE AGAIN

Slave Play, the writer's confrontational exploration of sex and race, electrified the West End this year – and turned a lens on a divided country.

AT THE HEIGHT of summer, the Noël Coward Theatre in London's West End was packed with the luminaries of Black British writing. Reni Eddo-Lodge was there; so were Otegha Uwagba, Roy Williams and Angelo Irving. Despite the fact that we were stuffed in like sardines, the room was agog. We were about to witness a play exploring a cocktail of British taboos: sex, race and unresolved trauma.

Slave Play, a three-act production that stormed Broadway in 2019, follows three couples as they embark on an experimental course of group therapy that involves role-playing their racially charged sexual fantasies. It's darkly comic, though creator Jeremy O Harris sees it as a blend of "science fiction and psychology". He was determined to bring it to the UK, where he has lived since the pandemic, because "the West End is where real theatre happens."

Harris was determined not to deviate too far from the original production. "When we were coming to the UK, there was this sort of hunger from other producers and collaborators to recast the show with British stars," he says. "I would rather do it in a basement with my original cast than have every Olivier and Bafta winner."

Nevertheless, four of the original cast were too busy to star in the London production. So the key roles of Kaneisha and Jim were played by Olivia Washington, star of acclaimed TV comedy *I'm A Virgo* (and daughter of Denzel), and Kit Harington, fresh off the back of *Game of Thrones* before his return in *Industry*.

"For Kaneisha, I always look for a woman who has the deep, dark depths of a clown, but the ferocity of a lion. Olivia had that – tenfold," Harris explains. "And what I'm always looking for in a Jim is a white actor who doesn't want to make it about him. From the moment Kit opened his mouth on the first day of rehearsal, I knew I could trust any Kaneisha I found with him. The relationship between Kit and Olivia was so trusting and so beautiful."

In February, then-Prime Minister Rishi Sunak condemned the production for staging two nights aimed exclusively at Black audiences, known as Black Out Nights. The backlash came as a surprise to Harris. "I think there was this feeling, even from some liberals or people who imagined they were allies, that I had talked about my Black Out Nights to gin up drama or grab headlines." Not captured in the furore was the fact Harris had staged Black Out Nights in London before. "It was an innocuous thing when I did it [for his play, *Daddy*] in 2020. It was written about in the papers. Bernardine Evaristo tweeted about it and was there. I didn't think it was going to be a big deal to do it in 2024."

Slave Play's success has ensured that Harris's next project, *Spirit of the People* – he describes it as "a horror story about a gay man on a quickly gentrifying beach" – will be one of the most hotly anticipated events in theatre.

But for now, what has Harris, a Virginia native, observed about life in Britain? "I learned that in the UK, politeness has been weaponised to allow people to not have to think about the violences of the crown and the state. In my two times in production here, I even saw Black British people make sort of excuses [about] the great colonising entity that is the UK in an effort to be polite about the place we were in.

"I was like, Wow: the powers that be in this country have so completely socialised an idea of what expected behaviour is across the board, that even people who have evidence of their own subjugation will deny it to maintain the status quo. To keep calm and carry on." –NELSON ABBEY

Jacket and cardigan by **Dior Men.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY **MANUEL OBADIA-WILLS**

EVE HEWSON CAN REALLY RELATE

GQ World MOTY

With outstanding turns in *Bad Sisters* and *The Perfect Couple*, the actor has perfected playing normal people in weird situations. A bit like fame, then.

EVE HEWSON HAS been acting for half her life, but, until recently, she's been defined by her roles in two families. In Sharon Horgan's widely acclaimed black comedy *Bad Sisters*, Hewson plays Becka, the youngest of the tight-knit Garvey clan. And in real life, she's the daughter of Bono, the rock-star philanthropist from U2.

Bad Sisters – about a group of Dublin sisters conspiring to kill their abusive brother-in-law – was a hit for Apple TV+ in 2022, somewhat to the cast's surprise. "We didn't think anybody would watch our show," says Hewson. "We just loved it, and believed in Sharon."

But audiences fell in love with the Garvey sisters, despite their murderous intent. Playing the baby of a family of big personalities, Hewson could have been lost in the crowd; instead, she made the quietest person in the room the most compelling to watch. Despite a sometimes flinty exterior, Becka feels deeply and is fiercely driven to protect those she loves. Hewson says she's similar: "I have a good, stone-cold resting bitch face, I've been told, but inside, I'm very sensitive and kind of mushy – and I saw that in Becka."

Hewson's performance was nominated for a Hollywood Critics Association TV Award; even the famously snide website Gawker singled her out as "really good". But the acclaim rarely failed to mention her show-business lineage as the second-eldest child of Paul (aka Bono) and Ali Hewson. After the show came out, Hewson was roped into the "nepo baby" discourse by a *New York Magazine* cover story about second-generation celebrities.

While others chafed at the suggestion that they'd inherited their careers, Hewson perfectly trod the line between acknowledging her privilege and poking fun, feigning disappointment at not making *New York*'s cover – while pointing out the CEO of the magazine's parent company was also a so-called "nepo baby". "For my whole life, that conversation has always happened: people always have an opinion of me before I even meet them," she says. So she focuses on doing good work, driven by her own standards. "Proving myself to me is more important than to other people."

Hewson has been proving herself since 2014's medical drama *The Knick*. A few months ago, *The New York Times* declared that she "keeps getting discovered". "It's true, I do," she says. But this year it feels that audiences are finally catching on, helped by her leading role in *The Perfect Couple*, Netflix's hugely successful miniseries about a society wedding derailed by a suspicious death. As the bride-to-be looking wide-eyed at her future in-laws' extravagances, Hewson serves as the show's moral centre – and also goes toe-to-toe with fellow *GQ* MOTY honouree Nicole Kidman. "We had the time of our life on that job," says Hewson. The show's internet-famous opening credits, showing the entire cast performing a TikTok-style dance, are a testament to the inclusive set created by director Susanne Bier, Hewson adds, laughing: "We wouldn't have done that had we not liked her."

When we speak, Hewson has just finished shooting a pilot from *Barry* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* director Alec Berg, set in the world of Formula 1. "It's a really hilarious comedy, but it also has a beautiful family dynamic between a father and a daughter," she tells me. She's more guarded about her role in Noah Baumbach's next film, in which she rounds out a cast led by George Clooney, Adam Sandler and Laura Dern. All Hewson will say is that it was "brilliant" to work with Baumbach, who's been on her bucket list of collaborators since *The Squid and the Whale*.

For now, Hewson is relishing the return of *Bad Sisters*. Critics questioned the need for a second series, given how neatly the first was resolved, but for Hewson, it was a chance to revisit a character – not to mention a cast – she truly loves, for once not having to worry about the next gig. "I spent all my 20s worrying, When am I going to get another job? Am I going to get a call back? Just being kind of on edge," she says. "And right now I can go, I'm OK." —ELLE HUNT

Top and jumper by **Miu Miu.** Trousers by **Wales Bonner.**

STYLING, JESSICA GERARDI. HAIR, HALLEY BRISKER. MAKE-UP, MARI KUNO. TAILORING, MEL LYSÉ.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **LAURA McCLUSKEY**

GQ World
MOTY

ADRIEN BRODY IS REBUILDING

After a booked-out London stage debut, the actor is once again being hailed as an Oscars favourite for Brady Corbet's astonishing architectural drama *The Brutalist*.

WHILE THE MAJORITY of this year's Oscar contenders are schmoozing on the campaign trail, Adrien Brody is holed up in the dressing room of a small theatre – for the moment, away from it all.

It's October, and the Best Actor frontrunner has stepped onto the London stage for the first time in *The Fear of 13*, Lindsey Ferrentino's play about a man wrongfully put on death row. At the same time, Brody's latest movie, *The Brutalist* – a magnificently formed and operatic drama about the making and breaking of a Hungarian architect in post-Second World War America – has become the superlative-laden film of the season, ever since it debuted at the Venice Film Festival in September. Running at three and a half hours with an interval and shot on Vistavision, a technique not used in US cinema since 1961, it's an exacting feat of modern cinema that captures the collision point of art and capitalism. The film's trailer proudly flexes that no fewer than five leading critics have dubbed it "monumental". It's easily Brody's best work in years.

Brody was 29 when he won an Oscar in 2003 for his gruelling performance in *The Pianist*, playing a Jewish musician in Poland who survived the war. Since then, he's become one of the great recognisable character actors, appearing in five Wes Anderson films and, briefly, as a laid-back billionaire activist in season three of *Succession*. Now 51, he feels the film industry has struggled to figure out what to do with him since that early win. "It's been hard to find something of that magnitude for me, even in a leading role," he says. "It's taken me decades."

The Brutalist broke that spell. Over five years ago, Brody met the film's director Brady Corbet, who was interested in him playing the lead, László Tóth. At first the part went to Joel Edgerton, before shoot scheduling and the pandemic meant the role was back in Brody's lap. He prepared by reading up on post-war American architecture and taking lessons in Hungarian dialect. "I felt so well-suited to honour this character and represent what [Corbet] needed for it," he says. "I felt connected to it. I felt responsible for it."

Brody's mother, the photographer Sylvia Plachy, escaped the Hungarian Revolution when she was a child, eventually moving to New York. His maternal grandmother hid from Nazi occupation in Budapest. There are tendrils tying this fictional character he plays to his own ancestry, so much so that when he spoke in character, he realised: "My grandfather sounded much like László."

–*The Brutalist* took Corbet over seven years to make. In the end, the same film that has seemed to shake cinema, and give Brody the role he's long been searching for, was shot in six weeks last summer for less than £7.8 million. "I'm an artist who really wants to paint a certain way," Brody says. "Not all of that work is embraced or embraceable." This time around, he's found himself sharing – and agreeing with – critics' thoughtful and enthusiastic reviews of the film. The experience has helped Brody solidify a belief that there is art out there worth making; that his patience paid off. "It was a painful journey," he says. "But there was beauty in that." —DOUGLAS GREENWOOD

Jacket by **Mfpen.** Vest by **CDLP.** Trousers by **Brioni.** Watch by **Omega.**

STYLING, KIT SWANN. TAILORING, FAYE OAKENFULL. GROOMING, EMMA WHITE TURLE AT THE WALL GROUP USING R+CO HAIRCARE. SET DESIGN, MIRIAM BUETHER.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ELLIOTT MORGAN**

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GQ MOTY 2024

JUDE LAW'S

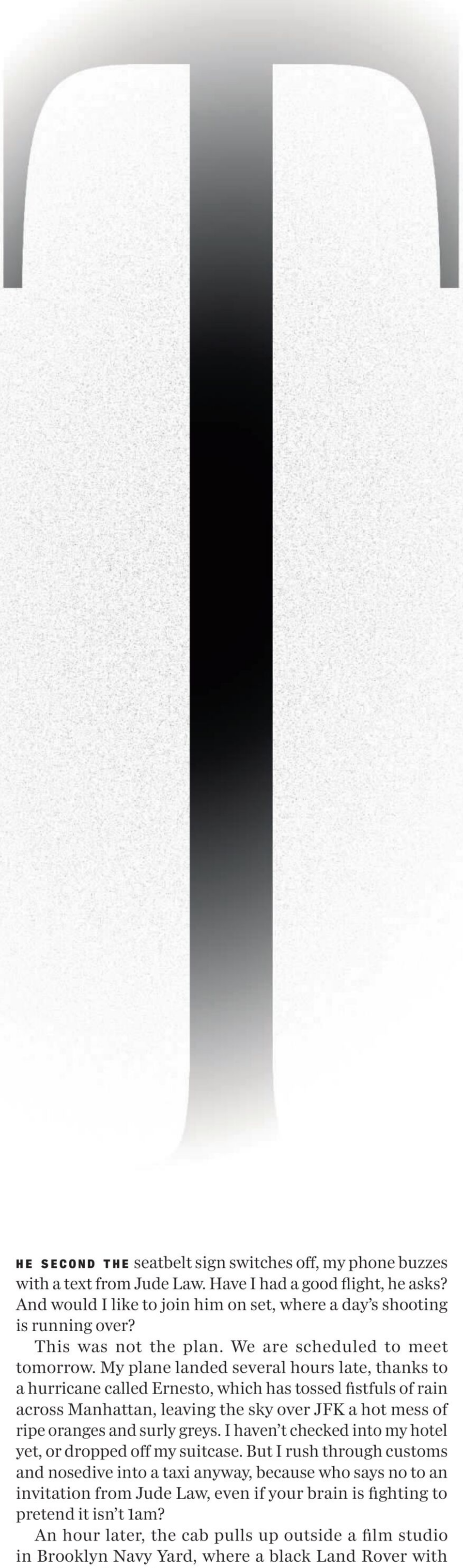
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAOLA KUDACKI

STYLED BY ANGELO MITAKOS

BY SAM PARKER

BEAUTIFUL DISAPPEARING ACT

For decades, he's captivated audiences as a certain kind of character: charming. Handsome. Beautiful, even. So much so that people saw him that way, too. Now 51, and with a run of prestige talked-about projects, Jude Law is casting that aside, and embracing roles that are darker. Gnarlier. It might just set him free.



THE SECOND THE seatbelt sign switches off, my phone buzzes with a text from Jude Law. Have I had a good flight, he asks? And would I like to join him on set, where a day's shooting is running over?

This was not the plan. We are scheduled to meet tomorrow. My plane landed several hours late, thanks to a hurricane called Ernesto, which has tossed fistfuls of rain across Manhattan, leaving the sky over JFK a hot mess of ripe oranges and surly greys. I haven't checked into my hotel yet, or dropped off my suitcase. But I rush through customs and nosedive into a taxi anyway, because who says no to an invitation from Jude Law, even if your brain is fighting to pretend it isn't 1am?

An hour later, the cab pulls up outside a film studio in Brooklyn Navy Yard, where a black Land Rover with tinted windows then ferries me past the security gate towards a huge, unmarked hangar. Inside, a camera crew is roaming around what looks like an entire bar set, built from scratch. I'm handed a pair of headphones and told to watch a monitor.

For a few seconds, nothing. Then Law bursts into frame, half running, half falling down a staircase, screaming "FUCK!" into a mobile phone. Repeating the lines would be a spoiler for Netflix's *Black Rabbit*, out next year. But, suffice to say, something has gone very wrong for his character. The diatribe ends with a lingering shot of Law's panting face.

"That's a wrap!" someone shouts, and the lights go up. Suddenly everything is being disassembled and packed away. Through the throng, Law steps out in a black suit, drenched in sweat and smiling.

"You made it!" he says with an outstretched hand. He immediately begins giving a whirlwind tour of the set, during which he stops to point out several small intricacies – the fully stocked bar, pictures hung on the wall – and greets every runner and guy holding a screwdriver warmly and by name.

After 20 minutes I'm in the blacked-out car again, this time next to a baby seat that usually carries one of Law's two youngest children. They join him, along with his wife Phillipa, wherever in the world he is filming (earlier this year it was Australia, making Ron Howard's *Eden* alongside Sydney Sweeney and Vanessa Kirby). Law is riding shotgun, talking animatedly about *Black Rabbit*, seeming nothing like a man who has just ended a 15-hour day on set. Silhouettes of skyscrapers rise from the crest of the Brooklyn Bridge like trees at the edge of a forest. On the other side, Law leaps out and gives a cheerful goodbye before vanishing down a rain-streaked SoHo street.

JUDE LAW ALWAYS wanted to disappear. When he was a kid, he watched Daniel Day-Lewis in *A Room With a View* and then *My Beautiful Laundrette* and could not believe they were the same person. When he started acting, that was his goal: to be an enigma, a shape-shifter, a performer who vanished into roles. The problem was that from the moment he became famous, audiences wanted something different. They wanted him – Jude Law, the guy they thought might just be the most handsome and charming man in the world.

I wait for him the next morning outside a café-bar a few blocks from Washington Square Park. He appears in a white Sunspel T-shirt, beautifully pleated cream trousers and a pair of faded white sneakers. He orders a cortado and can't help but flash the waitress a smile so full-watted it is frankly a bit much, like watching someone pay for a pack of gum when all they've got on them is a £50 note.

Law is 51 years old, but looks more like a man in his late 30s, because in his 30s he looked like a man in his 20s, and in his 20s he looked like... well, I'm not falling into that trap, one that confounded seemingly every film journalist between 1997 and the late 2000s as they strained to describe Law's luminosity in films like *Wilde* and *The Talented Mr Ripley* (a favourite: "He possesses a beauty that seems almost fanged").

For a long time, Law considered his handsomeness a curse as well as a blessing, something he had to play down in order to be taken seriously. This determination is part of what helped him amass one of the richest CVs in Hollywood. There's a Jude Law deep cut for just about everyone: sci-fi aficionados (*Gattaca*, *AI Artificial Intelligence*), fans of cult comedies (*I Heart Huckabees*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*), sweeping period epics (*Cold Mountain*, *Anna Karenina*) and brooding indie dramas (*Closer*). That's before you even get to *Harry Potter* or the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

← ←
OPENING PAGE
all clothing
Bottega Veneta

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OPPOSITE PAGE
all clothing
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"Over the course of his career, he's done everything," says his *Firebrand* co-star Alicia Vikander. "I think everyone's kind of blown away by the extreme shifts in characters he's played." Natalie Portman, who appeared alongside Law in *Cold Mountain* and *Closer*, told me, "Jude is perhaps our best character actor. He can really do anything." Despite this range, he is still regularly discussed in terms of how beautiful he is even today, from the Gen Z obsession with his character in *The Holiday* to viral photos of his impressive beach bod from the set of *The New Pope* in 2019.

And yet to watch Law's most recent performances is to experience something strange: you forget it is him altogether. Not just because you're engrossed by the quality of his acting – which is always the case, even in so-called bad Jude Law movies – but because there is something so un–Jude Law–like about them.

Both his latest projects rank among his finest work. The first is as an FBI agent in *The Order*, a taut, Coen Brothers–esque thriller about a white supremacist terror group in 1980s Idaho (helmed by charismatic leader Bob Mathews, played by Nicholas Hoult). The second is a virtuoso turn as Henry VIII in British film *Firebrand*, a claustrophobic and disturbing account of the king's marriage to his sixth and final wife Katherine Parr (Alicia Vikander).

Law plays history's most famous monarch as a doleful, distracted tyrant, prone to sudden and revolting acts of violence. He paws and pets at people like they're animals, stuffs his fingers in their mouths – an idea, he says with a hint of guilt, he got from watching a documentary about Jimmy Savile: "I just thought [that] was so disgusting and so offensive, and I was looking for something that had that heightened sense of assumed power, the violation." These scenes were the first time in Law's career he really felt the need for an intimacy coordinator, who checked privately with the cast whether they were OK with being mauled by Law, who to make matters worse used a special perfume to make sure he stank like rotting flesh (Henry VIII lived out his final decade with an open leg wound). "If I am touching people and sticking my fingers in their noses and in their mouths, they have to be happy that I'm allowed to do that," he says.

Law's portrayal of Henry deftly sidesteps caricature at every turn, including the decision not to go in for a Christian Bale–style body transformation or prosthetics to evoke what he calls "the Henry VIII silhouette". What he creates instead is something much more insidious and absorbing – "the man within this beast" is how Vikander puts it. The first time we see Henry, he is playing the recorder, like a little boy – an unscripted idea that came to Law before filming. "A lot of the process I went through was thinking about [Henry's] childhood," he explains. "He was the second son, so he was probably enjoying some incredibly fun years until his brother died. And then he was taken and put in a castle in Wales where he was guarded, because suddenly he was the heir and wasn't allowed to do all that fun stuff any more. It's almost abusive. He's been told since he's a child that he's second only to God. And now it's like living in a bubble. Nothing is actually fulfilling him any more. The food, the drink, the power, the sex – anything." Law says Henry is haunted by "a sense of who he was 20 years ago: the golden boy of Europe."

→
blazer and shirt
Lemaire
tie
Budd

That adjective – golden – was ascribed to Law, too, in the early part of his career. "It shocked me when I realised Henry was my age. There was a sense in me too, turning 50 – you can't help but look back at the person you were, or the person you thought you might be," says Law. "In the business I'm in, being cast as a good-looking young guy in my 20s, or being a heartthrob, or all those labels that are thrown at people in the public eye... I had a real connection to that sense of former glories."

WE GO FOR a walk. The air is unusually crisp and clear, like storm Ernesto has swept the city clean. Somewhere in SoHo we come across a playground Law knows, wedged between two tall apartment blocks. It is empty except for a toddler clambering up a tatty green climbing frame, hoping to catch the eye of his father, who is basking for a moment in the mid-morning sun. We find a stone table with a chessboard embedded in it and settle on opposite sides.

People keep asking Jude Law to look back. It is, he thinks, something to do with his age. You hit 50 and suddenly there's a lot in the rearview mirror that needs to be sorted into some kind of narrative. Others become nostalgic for who you once were and what you once did. Former glories that, if you're not careful, can start to overwhelm you.

Law's breakout film role was in *Wilde*. He played Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas, the young lover of Oscar (Stephen Fry). It was 1997; Law was a successful theatre actor, but still only 24. He remembers reading up on Douglas obsessively – a process he still follows today when portraying a real-life character – and discovering that "no one had a single nice thing to say about this guy". That was the green light he needed to gobble up every scene as the breathtakingly cruel socialite, who sneers and mocks and eventually breaks the poet's heart. "I liked the idea of demonstrating fearlessness as an actor. I think I wanted to show people I would do whatever a part required," he says. "But if I'm really honest, some of that was also just 20-something Jude on a wing and a prayer."

His performance in *Wilde* caught the attention of critics and filmmakers alike, including the British director Anthony Minghella, who offered him the role of Dickie Greenleaf. *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999) featured an embarrassment of bright young things, most already a step ahead of Law in terms of stardom – Gwyneth Paltrow, Matt Damon, Cate Blanchett, Philip Seymour Hoffman – but he somehow outshone them all, overcoming his imposter syndrome on set by fully inhabiting Dickie's cocksure persona. "When I met him, he was extremely excitable and optimistic and like very pure, very unjaded," Paltrow told me. "Even though it wasn't his first movie or anything, he [had a] very young, sweet energy."

"A lot of that was, Well, I've got to be the guy that everyone wants to be. It's really important that I conjure that swagger out of nowhere," Law says. "So I had to sort of put it on. Getting the suntan, getting the hair done, wearing the clothes, playing the sax... all of that stuff. I remember Anthony being incredibly encouraging to go and have delicious dinners, order the best wines, take the yacht out for the day if you're not filming."

"TURNING 50, YOU CAN'T HELP BUT LOOK BACK AT THE PERSON YOU WERE, OR THE PERSON YOU THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE."

“I LIKED THE IDEA OF DEMONSTRATING FEARLESSNESS AS AN ACTOR. I WANTED TO SHOW PEOPLE I WOULD DO WHATEVER A PART REQUIRED.”

suit
Giorgio Armani

shirt
Anderson & Sheppard

watch
Cartier

He remembers *Ripley* the way the rest of us might a formative holiday; a precious passage of time just before the pressures of adulthood fully kick in: "We were there taking the boats out, taking over Positano and going to Naples, going to Venice. I mean, it was incredible." There was a tiny seafood restaurant near the waterfront where "the fish were literally jumping out of the sea into the kitchen" that became the unofficial cast canteen; Law and the others would gather there most evenings to watch the ocean and talk about the future. "There was a sense of relish from all these wonderful young actors who loved what they were doing, loved being there," he says. "It was a beautiful time."

Ripley was the start of a partnership with Minghella that lasted until the director's death in 2008, and yielded both of Law's Oscar nominations to date: for Greenleaf, and several years later for his role in *Cold Mountain*. But it was also one that nearly didn't happen. Law's fear of being typecast as "charming, handsome man" had already kicked in; he turned down the script three times. Thankfully, Minghella kept courting him – "rather than walking away in a huff because I'd been such an idiot to say no" – teasing details about the cast and production until he finally agreed.

"I mistook Dickie as just a good-looking guy on a boat," Law says, leaning forwards over the chessboard. "And of course what [Minghella] saw were all these layers of complexity: a guy on the run; a guy who's spoiled; a guy who's sort of pretending to be something he's not really. He slowly encouraged me to make that jump."

Most of us can conjure some image of ourselves at the peak of our youth and beauty. It might be a memory, or captured in a photograph on Facebook. For Jude Law, it is immortalised on screen: as Dickie Greenleaf, lying on a sunlounger in pristine white swimming trunks, his hands locked behind his head, eyes closed to a world unfurling endlessly before him. In the years since, that shot has become a kind of Platonic ideal of young male hotness; a statue of *David* for the internet generation.

"That's the still I'll be showing the kids and the grandkids..." he agrees. "I mean, if I look at [*Ripley*] positively, obviously that role changed my life. It changed my career. It gave me incredible opportunities and opened doors for several years. [But] if I look at it cynically, it's like, 'Oh, did I sort of lean in to playing the good-looking guy? And did it forever cast that shadow over me?'"

The answer, at least to begin with, seemed to be no. After *Ripley*, Law's career went into overdrive. He appeared in a dizzying 11 movies between 2000 and 2004. There was a chilling hitman in Sam Mendes' *Road to Perdition*. An insouciant Errol Flynn in Martin Scorsese's epic *The Aviator*. A lonely, cybersexing writer in Mike Nichols' *Closer*. No dashing leading men, just character parts in films by some of the world's greatest directors – or, as Law describes it, "an insane sudden flurry of attention from people I dreamed of working with." So fine-tuned was his radar for a good role, he felt confident enough to play with his burgeoning hot young actor image as Gigolo Joe, a robot designed to pleasure frustrated housewives in Steven Spielberg's *AI Artificial Intelligence*.

Portman has a story from this period, about working with Law on *Closer*. It captures the eager energy he brought to set and the unusual level of attentiveness he paid to his colleagues. "Jude is so positive and joyful and kind, and doesn't do any of the nonsense that sometimes people do when they have to show everyone how serious they are," she wrote to me in an email. "He and I had a very emotional scene together, and right before we were talking about a difficult thing I had gone through recently in my personal life. He was so empathetic and listened so thoughtfully, and when we started the scene, the connection was just so strong. It allowed for a certain rawness I had never felt before [while] working."

"THERE WAS A SENSE OF RELISH FROM ALL THESE WONDERFUL YOUNG ACTORS WHO LOVED WHAT THEY WERE DOING, LOVED BEING THERE... [*RIPLEY*] WAS A BEAUTIFUL TIME."

Law's film career at that time was starting to resemble that of his heroes: not just Daniel Day-Lewis but Gary Oldman and Sean Penn. But off-camera, his life was being pulled in a very different direction. He became an obsession of early '00s tabloid culture, then at the peak of its destructive powers. In 2003 he and his first wife, the actress Sadie Frost – with whom he'd been labelled part of the "Primrose Hill set" of celebrities that included Kate Moss and the Gallaghers – divorced. Shortly afterwards he entered into another high-profile relationship, with actress Sienna Miller. They met on the set of a big-budget remake of the 1966 Michael Caine vehicle *Alfie*, about a cockney womaniser who cavorts around London before finally seeing the error of his ways.

Rather than playfully subverting Law's reputation, *Alfie* only seemed to cement it in the minds of a public being fed spurious gossip about him on a daily basis. (In preparation for our interview, I bought the one book I could find on Jude Law, a tawdry mosaic of unsubstantiated rumours, released not long after *Alfie*, called *Jude Law: A Man for All Ladies* – truly a relic of its time.) The relationship with Miller ramped up the press intrusion to insufferable heights, and taught him to bring the shutters down on his personal life.

Later, I ask him if agreeing to interviews like this still feels inherently risky, like exposing too much of who he is could hinder his work somehow. "That's a really good question," he replies. "There's huge amounts of me that no one knows about, that I've never given in to reveal, or have any interest in revealing. And it gets frustrating sometimes, because I've been in the public eye for nearly 30 years and I feel like there are certain perceptions that I can't really change [that] people have of me because of narratives that have been written, or rehashed stories from decades ago that are constantly poked at. But I don't think there's enough of me out there for people to see me in a part and think: I don't buy that! I hope not."

Alfie was the first time Law went against his instincts in accepting a role – and it was his first major flop. Made for £45m, it clawed back a little over half of its budget worldwide and was panned by critics (mostly, it should be noted, for the script, rather than Law's performance). For an actor determined to preserve a sense of enigma and not be pigeonholed, it felt like an own goal.

"I was in a really strong position [at that time] because I'd just had another [Oscar] nomination on the back of *Cold Mountain*," Law remembers, "and for *Alfie* to be the

← suit **Brunello Cucinelli** shirt **Anderson & Sheppard** watch **Cartier**

“WHEN YOU ARE FRESH OUT OF THE GATE, EVERYONE IS INTRIGUED AND EVERYONE WANTS A PIECE OF YOU. AND THEN AS SOON AS YOU HAVE A COUPLE OF MISFIRES, THEIR ATTENTION GOES ELSEWHERE.”

film I chose to do quite soon after that, I think was a bad move.” He saw an early screening, and his heart sank. He’d imagined something grittier, with more to say. “I just felt it hadn’t elevated [the material] and felt a little light, a little too cheesy,” he says. “I think it was made for too much money, and I was probably paid too much money, which I underestimated at the time. I kicked myself that I’d done something that was leaning into the heartthrob and the charismatic lead and it hadn’t worked.”

I ask him if it knocked his confidence. He looks down at the chessboard for a few seconds.

“Yes, I think it probably did,” he says. “Everyone has hits, everyone has flops. But yes, I think it did. It also made me aware that, when you are fresh out of the gate, everyone is intrigued and everyone wants a piece of you. And then as soon as you have a couple of misfires, their attention goes elsewhere. And so there’s a part of you also thinking, Oh, OK, how do I get that attention back?”

WE MEET FOR breakfast the next morning underneath the Brooklyn Bridge. Some old wooden ships are docked in front of the East River for tourists, a scene that bears a passing resemblance to Greenwich, a part of London near to where Law grew up. We’re struggling to find the entrance to this giant market-cum-restaurant that he wants to take me to, so he turns to a group at a table and, with impeccable manners, asks for help. They look at him with the glee of people who know they’ve just banked a story to tell later. Then inside, the teenager on the egg counter not only asks for his name but also how to spell it. He smiles and obliges with equal grace: “J-U-D-E.”

After *Alfie*, Law’s movie output slowed down. He went a few years without yielding a major hit. Then an opportunity came along for him to take on a role which has tested ambitious actors for the past 400 years: Hamlet. In 2009 he played the Dane in a gruelling seven-month run that spanned the West End and Broadway. It was a huge success, the hottest theatre ticket of the year on both sides of the pond.

When it was all over, Law broke down. He took a shower after the final show and, “I just wept. That really took me by surprise. It had been a great job, but I think I just let go of all this fear and tension and responsibility.” It must have felt validating, I say, after *Alfie*: the public scramble for tickets, the newspaper critics fawning over you? “Kind of, yeah,” he says. “[Although] I always felt like the reviews were slightly begrudging.”

In the decade after *Hamlet*, Law’s filmography reads like a guy having a lot of fun and staying busy. There was *Sherlock Holmes* – a massive box office hit alongside Robert Downey Jr. (“You can’t ask for a better collaborator than Jude,” Downey Jr told me. “He’s so insightful, additive, capable and tolerant. I’ve rarely seen someone take their craft so seriously without applying that seriousness directly to themselves.”) There was *Dom Hemingway* and *Black Sea* and *Spy* and *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*, all mainstream genre pieces or inconsistent comedies. When I read this sequence out to him, Law laughs as though hearing it for the first time. “Bonkers!” is his assessment.

In 2017, he landed one of his most cherished roles, joining the *Harry Potter* universe as a young Albus Dumbledore in two *Fantastic Beasts* films. It was a part he undertook with great care, because he had bonded with his stepson by reading the books together years earlier. *Beasts* has been a troubled franchise, with an unusual amount of controversy attached to the trilogy thanks to JK Rowling, Johnny Depp and Ezra Miller – “The trifecta of hitting yourself in the face,” Law agrees wryly – not that it has put him off the idea of doing another film. (Rowling has said *Beasts* is a five-film series, though Warner Bros is yet to confirm a fourth.) “I’ll just wait until I get the phone call,” he says. “I hope [it happens]. What we all know of that character’s journey is wonderful. There’s lots more to tell.”

The following year he finally dipped his toe into superhero films, after famously having turned down the role of Superman in 2003, by taking the part of Yon-Rogg in the Brie Larson–helmed *Captain Marvel* – a film that was review-bombed in part by misogynist trolls, though Law, who has never been on social media, says he missed that controversy altogether. “Would I do another one? Probably not,” he says. “It was all right. [My character] was a bit dry. I wanted to be a bit funnier. I was hoping to be a bit more of a sort of moustache-twirling villain, and I think I kept coming up with ideas that were not going in this film. And so I just sort of did what I was told.”

I ask if his experiences of these two particularly vociferous fandoms adds any spice to his recent decision to join the *Star Wars* universe, in this December’s Disney+ series *Skeleton Crew*. “It makes me a little bit nervous, if I’m honest, in the same way that I felt a responsibility to really make sure Dumbledore had a heart and soul that was considered and true,” he says. “It’s the same with this. I mean, there are haters everywhere, it seems nowadays, unfortunately. People have very acute opinions of this galaxy and how it should be handled. Obviously, you hope you’re going to get a majority of them on your side, and you’re aware that you may not win all of them over.”

THE SECOND ACT of Jude Law’s career did what it was supposed to: it kept the audience’s attention, and it kept him earning. He is not, he insists, in the category of actors who could retire tomorrow. “Some figures are thrown around about some actors getting paid this and that, and they clearly have more than enough to probably never work again,” he says. “[But] they choose to and that’s great. Their lives [just] get bigger; the expenses get bigger, more pools to clean. But I’m not in that category, and so I genuinely have to work.”

→
jumper
Ferragamo
trousers
Auralee

Even so, something tangible has changed in the past five years. He's gone on a run of film and TV projects that are, with respect to Starforce commander Yon-Rogg, on a different level. The work is getting more daring, more personal – more like the career Law imagined for himself. It started in 2016 with *The Young Pope*, Paolo Sorrentino's sumptuous, genre-shifting series about religion and morality. Then, in 2020, there was thriller *The Third Day*, an experimental series that included a 12-hour live segment shot in one continuous take. That same year, Law appeared in *The Nest* – one of his best films for decades – in which he plays Rory O'Hara, a British financier whose charms begin to fail him as he tries to rescue an unravelling marriage. Then there are *Firebrand* and *The Order*, which have led to film festival murmurs that Law should be in contention for his first Oscar nomination since 2004.

I put it to him that he is in a new phase. A third act.

"All the work you just mentioned there, I was thrilled to be a part of, and I was really pleased with the results," he says. "It's very interesting, actually; the one common denominator is my wife. Meeting Phil and falling in love with her and the relationship we've been in has been a huge influence on my life. I've never felt happier. I've never felt more supported. And my home has felt incredibly safe and secure. I don't want this to sound like it never was before, but when you meet someone particular and you click and they understand your work and your needs, you are in a good place. So I felt hugely nurtured by that and by her."

Law met Phillipa not long before filming *The Young Pope*. In it he plays Lenny, the insurgent pontiff, with a palpably heightened energy and more than a touch of transcendental bliss. For fans of his work, it seemed Law had found some new gear. Perhaps it was just love: between filming, he and Phillipa were exploring Italy together, two decades after he did the same with the cast of *Ripley*. I ask if having her as his ballast enables him to make bolder choices in his work. "Yeah, I think so," he says. "Also, Phil's a psychologist. So we enjoy a very healthy relationship where we talk a lot about how we feel, our relationships with friends, relationships with our families, and she has a wonderful perspective on all of that. I think one should, in middle age, start to reflect. What are the patterns I've created? What are the relationships I have? Why do I have them like that? How do I feel about them?"

Asking himself these difficult questions has made it easier to find the humanity in characters like Henry VIII. "It is a really exciting and good place to be in your own life," he says. "And as an actor, it can be the beginning of a really exciting, fresh approach to the parts you play and where you are willing to go."

(There is another, more prosaic and rather sweet way his domestic life has influenced his work. As Terry Husk, the bruised FBI agent in *The Order*, the transformation is startling, and not just because of the '80s moustache. From the first shot Law looks hollowed out, with sunken, bloodshot eyes. Partly this is because his character is supposed to symbolise American society reeling from the reemergence of the far right. "And then equally, if I'm really honest," he says, "I was drawing on the fact that I had a one-year-old and a two-year-old at home, and I was absolutely knackered.")

In a recent interview with the British journalist Samira Ahmed, Law spoke of having an energy that sometimes makes him feel exhausted: the need to be buoyant. His words kept popping into my head when I read Portman's story about their heart-to-heart, and when Vikander told me, "He's extremely giving and open-hearted, not only to actors and directors, but the crew. He just makes everyone feel extremely comfortable." I thought about it again when he invited me to the *Black Rabbit* set – which he didn't have to do, but did anyway because he knew it would give me more to write about – and when I got there and saw how he was with everyone.

"Sounds like I was being very honest," says Law, when I remind him of what he told Ahmed. "Well, that's about me learning how to handle myself as I get older. I think being 'on' – being approachable, being friendly – is something of a default setting that comes from, I guess, my childhood and my role in my family. The broadest term is 'people pleasing'. But at the same time, I know I have an absolute contradictory side to that where my energy is very low and I can be quite brusque and – not cold hopefully, not rude – but shut off, to protect myself on set."

It helps explain why Jude Law hits different these days. Just as his looks sometimes felt like a curse at the beginning, one could argue that that buoyant energy sometimes threatened to overwhelm his work, too. The vivacity he brought to each role is a joy to watch, but could be hard to unsee. Among the begrudging praise for his Hamlet was a review from the *New York Times* that began, "If vigour were all in acting Shakespeare, Jude Law would be a gold-medal Hamlet."

But in this new era, Law has mastered his gift. He imbues his characters with just enough charm to provide a little light to their shade. But he can also dispense of it altogether to become something else – furious, disturbed, lost in bitterness or suffering. He knows himself well enough now to be less of himself. He no longer has to be a whirlwind. He has finally learned how to disappear.

Beside the Brooklyn Bridge, the sun is becoming a bit much, so we shuffle over to a table in the shade. Above us, the sky is clear and blue. Seagulls dive between the masts of the boats and out towards the East River, which after a restless few days is now flat and still. Law begins to tell me an idea he had for a film recently. He was driving around London, and kept passing spots that stirred up powerful memories. "God, I remember falling out of that house. And then, Oh, that's where I found out Sadie was pregnant. I suddenly thought, What a wonderful way to tell a story…" He stops himself and laughs. "Actually, I'm not going to share this."

With that we shake hands and say goodbye and Law realises, with great delight, he has time for something unusual – a walk, on his own, with nowhere to be. And so he sets off towards the river, smiling a smile for no one other than himself.

SAM PARKER *is* BRITISH GQ*'s site director.*

← t-shirt **The Row** neckerchief **Margaret Howell** trousers **Jil Sander**

GROOMING, LAILA HAYANI. PROP STYLING, CAZ SLATTERY. TAILORING, SARAH LATHROP. PRODUCTION, ALIGN PRODUCTION.

"I THINK BEING 'ON' – BEING APPROACHABLE, BEING FRIENDLY – IS SOMETHING OF A DEFAULT SETTING THAT COMES FROM, I GUESS, MY CHILDHOOD."

CENTRAL CEE

HIS RAWNESS AND WIT ON VIRAL HITS LIKE “DOJA” AND “SPRINTER” HAVE TAKEN HIM FROM SHEPHERD’S BUSH TO SOLD-OUT SHOWS AND FASHION WEEK FRONT ROWS. AS HE PREPARES TO UNVEIL HIS FIRST ALBUM, AND WITH MUSIC’S BIGGEST FORCES QUEUEING UP FOR A VERSE, CENCH IS READY FOR SOMETHING MORE PERMANENT.

BY ROBERT KAZANDJIAN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM ARCAND

STYLED BY ANGELO MITAKOS

IS BUILT TO LAST

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CENCH HAS BROUGHT THE GUYS WITH HIM.

THE RAPPER ARRIVES at our meeting, nestled in the grounds of a gothic Victorian hotel in Windsor, with three friends. Overlooking the Thames, our riverside hideout is quiet but for a handful of people having a late lunch: overstuffed burgers, wood-fired pizzas and big salads – of which the contents are grown in a walled vegetable and herb garden just outside – served by a front of house team who are all, on this day, conspicuously bald. The vibe: foliage, leatherbound books, wicker, wood, white people and a pleasant but incongruous chill house playlist.

Central Cee is dressed subtly. No iced-out Queen Lizzie chain around his neck. No rose-gold Day-Date with the olive green dial on his wrist. Just a black skull cap, Syna jacket and cargo shorts. He looks a little tired, but at ease with the setting. His friends, day ones from Cee's adolescence, looking equally relaxed in their dark tracksuits, head towards the river. "Usually, when we're here, we just get a boat," Cee explains, flashing a smile. Boys from the blocks of Shepherd's Bush, drifting lazily up and down the river like 16th-century noblemen, rightfully enjoying a space never imagined for them by its creators.

We settle into a long, watercress-green sofa that looks out onto the water. The view is dominated by a stately willow tree. Cee might look diminutive in photographs when he's channelling Cam'ron in a pink Jacquemus tracksuit or wrapped in oversized Burberry, but in the flesh he's tall and wiry, with the frame of a lightweight boxer. A thick-necked guy in a leather biker jacket and bootcut jeans (also bald) walks in at speed, not breaking stride as he acknowledges us. "All right, fellas?" Cee orders a matcha green latte with oat milk, albeit sceptically. "I don't know if I'll like it," he thinks out loud, like a kid who's just selected a mint Cornetto from the corner-shop freezer. Usually, he's a coffee guy, the extra caffeine propelling him through a timezone-hopping schedule. "I've been abusing it a bit too much," he admits.

It's almost two years to the day since Cee, 26, appeared on Power 106 Los Angeles, showering American listeners with multicultural cockney on his viral "LA Leakers Freestyle" ("In LA, it's Escalades, in the ends it's Mercedes vans"). The clip – which has more than 8 million views – seemed to mark an arrival: one of the few other British rappers to appear on the influential platform is Dave, with whom Cee spent 10 weeks at the top of the UK singles chart last summer courtesy of their song "Sprinter", which felt as inescapable as, well, a Sprinter. That July, he ran rings around Drake on their "On the Radar Freestyle". Over a breezy drill beat, Cee raps: "It used to be 3.5s, now I can sell out the O2 Arena twice." It's a reminder of the speed of his climb, from rapping about drug sales on independently-released tracks like 2020's "Day in the Life" to a rumoured eight-figure record deal with Columbia and Sony, from a Toyota Yaris to a Lamborghini Urus, from Shepherd's Bush to Beverly Hills.

Motion. Forwards. Upwards. Quickly. That's been life since Cee broke through. In 2021, he performed a triumphant homecoming show at the O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire to 2,000 fans; a year later he had 10,000 yelling along to "Khabib" at Alexandra Palace. In February 2023, he sold out his first US show, at New York City's Irving Plaza, with, of course, a Yankees fitted cap perched on top of his head like a crown. Now, he can't even play his Nintendo DS on the front row of the Louis Vuitton show at Paris Fashion Week without it being clipped down, posted to TikTok and dissected millions of times. This year he's doubled down on his role as our greatest rap diplomat via raucous international collaborations with J Cole, Lil Baby, Asake and Ice Spice. All the while, he's been in album mode, digging deep down into his truth during gruelling, interminable studio sessions. "You know when you're out of words, bro," he says, meeting my eyes, baulking at the thought of having to do anything else creative for a while. The album, *Can't Rush Greatness* – Cee's debut LP – is almost done. So more recently, away from music, he's been yearning for a slower way of living.

"Obviously, there's been success, but it's been kind of traumatic because I'm not taking nothing in," Cee says. "I'm doing mad things. Let's say there's me and seven of the mandem. Some of them have never been on holiday. Now we're all taking a flight every three days, every two days.

"There's been success, but it's been kind of traumatic because I'm not taking nothing in. Now we are taking a flight every three days, every two days."

←←
OPENING PAGES
vest and trousers
Alexander Wang
trainers
Nike
hat
Trapstar x Ed Hardy
watch (throughout)
G-Shock
earring and chain (throughout), his own

→
OPPOSITE PAGE
hoodie
CP Company
jacket and shorts
Mains
trainers and socks
Nike
gaming controller
PlayStation

vest
Zara

trousers
Burberry

trainers and
socks
Nike

underwear
Calvin Klein

sunglasses
Gentle Monster

car
Defender Octa

We've even been to three countries in one day. Not stopping to give thanks, we were just rolling, rolling, rolling." He pauses, as if the explanation felt as exhausting as the experience. "Not even taking in how *mad* this change has been."

QUIET WAS SOMETHING Cee's mum valued in their home, though as a kid he wasn't having any of it. "I was troublesome, innit," Cee admits. "I gave my mum a hard time. But she was always an advocate of this self-care ting. She would do yoga, meditate, write poems, read books. She'd try and encourage me to do those things as well. I'm a bit more understanding of it, but I still can't do it. You know what, I did try that floating ting. Have you tried it?"

A sensory deprivation tank?

"It's a bit weird. I've tried it twice. I thought the second time might be better. That's what they say. But I don't care to do it again," he says flatly. "It was a bit weird. It's all cold. You're naked. Fully naked. Your piece is just floating in the air. It's weird," he emphasises. "They say it's meant to take you back to the state of being in your mum's belly. Mad."

Before this year, Cee's life was lived in a loop of take-offs, landings and layovers. "I don't think I was in London for any longer than a week. I'd come home, drop my suitcase, sleep for a day and then pack my suitcase and get ready to go again. I was always on the move. When I was in London I'd need to check my dad, check my nan, check my auntie. And I'd just get overwhelmed and end up staying in my yard. I did want to link them but I wouldn't end up doing it," he explains. "But yeah, I've definitely been more still and a lot has changed."

Pausing has given Cee a chance to catch his breath, to appreciate the fruits of his labour. He's moved into a new place with 10 friends from the ends who've been riding with him since long before the fame. "Everyone that's got a good heart." It's "a proper house" as opposed to where he'd been renting previously, which he says in retrospect was just a "normal yard", despite it once feeling like the promised land. In his new digs, there's a garden vast enough for him to rip his pit bike up and down the lawn whenever he feels the urge. "The stillness has made me understand how blessed I am," he says. "This year's been about trying to understand who I am, and where I am."

Cee's life now is far removed from the matter-of-fact trap-house tales that informed his debut mixtape *Wild West*. The fact that he now pays "15 bags a month" (£15,000) for electricity had him admittedly "a bit shook" about the prospect of rapping from this new vantage point. "But I'm still with the mandem, so I'm grounded, I'm the same," he stresses. "When none of the mandem are really around me, when

"The stillness has made me understand how blessed I am. This year's been about trying to understand who and where I am."

"Off-grid. I live like that now. When I'm not doing work, we're in my yard, 10 of the mandem there, living off the compound. We've got space. There's no outside energy. It's a simple life, we love it."

they've got their own families, and I'm just in the yard living a simple life, I won't want to revisit certain things. I just won't rap, I don't think."

Those "certain things" are the street traumas that punctuate Cee's lyrics. "RIP A1, it's sad that he didn't see 18," he raps on "Day in the Life", one of his breakthrough singles. It's typical of his rapping style: no flashy metaphors; no lyrical miracles; just clear, concise feeling.

One of Cee's friends returns from the river. He's a big guy with a sharp trim and kind eyes. "I'm getting hungry, bruv. You want anything?" he asks Cee.

"Nah, I'm calm. What you getting, pasta?" Cee asks in return, in a knowing tone that suggests either the pasta here is very good, or his friend really likes pasta, or both.

Cee takes a sip of his matcha and screws his face up in disapproval. "I dunno," he says to himself, "it's reminding me a little bit of Horlicks."

We're sitting in a canopied hideaway. It's as private as a public space can be for Cee right now: one pair of young women swivel their necks to catch a glimpse of him as they pass, and a sole, floppy-haired guy in a Burberry T-shirt asks him for a picture. Otherwise, this must feel like a sanctuary compared with the circus that follows him in public. Cee's home offers that same feeling of escape. "Off-grid. I live like that now," he says. "When I'm not doing work, we're in my yard, 10 of the mandem there, living off the compound. We've got space. There's no outside energy. It's a simple life; we love it." Cee envisions a future for himself where that commitment to simplicity and stillness gets even deeper. "I need nature. I want real-life materials in my house," he explains. "I need nature because things change." He gestures a tattooed hand towards the trees on the riverbank. "You see them leaves that are red right now, they won't be red in winter. There's change all the time. Without that," he adds, "I'd go mad."

When Cee was little, he hated nature. Grass. Mud. Rain. Even playing in the sandpit or stomping in puddles. "I weren't on none of that," he remembers. "I hated everything. I was just tryna be clean. So I never valued nature, even though I was around it a bit." Strapped for cash but still wanting to give her boys the chance of a holiday, Cee's mum would take him and his little brothers away to the countryside, where they'd pitch a tent and spend long weekends and school breaks camping. "Now," he says, with genuine, boyish excitement, "I can't wait to go camping again. I appreciate these things now. I'm trying to plan a trip with the mandem to go camping soon." I take a moment to picture the UK's most recognisable rapper pitching a tent in the pouring rain at a cliff-top campsite on the South Coast.

→ hoodie **Stüssy**

Travelling has been one of the keys to Cee's own growth, and he wants his friends to be able to experience it as much as they can. "As soon as I had somewhere to go abroad, I brought as many people as I possibly could," he tells me. "As many people as I could fit on a flight."

For his self-directed video for "Moi", his recent single, which features a smoky French intro by Raye, he took his friends to Paris in a convoy of supercars – a Ferrari, a Lamborghini, a Maybach – all decked out in matching rose-gold chrome wraps. "We drove from the ends, all the way to Paris, through the Eurotunnel. Me, all the guys. It was a banging time," he says, in the way you might describe an afternoon spent go-karting with the lads.

"We all roll together when we can. That was so important to me, to give everyone a chance to see something. You might see something once. And it sparks an idea, or changes your outlook on life. I know how important it was to me, even to just look out the window of the bus."

CEE TELLS ME there are a couple of tracks – "wicked songs", dancehall cuts – that haven't quite made the final edit of the album. They're the legacy of a childhood spent amid the soul-rattling bass lines and syncopated rhythms of the Notting Hill Carnival. He was born in west London in June 1998. "By August, I was at Carnival," he says. "I was two months old and I was at Carnival, in my nan's arms." This ushered in a tradition for Cee. For the first 14 years of his life, he rounded off every summer by attending Carnival. Even after his parents split up when he was six, or five years later when he moved to a cramped two-bedroom flat in Shepherd's Bush with his mum and younger brothers, even after poverty strangled much of the joy from his home, he could unfurl once a year among the floats and sound systems.

Cee has a complicated relationship with memories, borne out of the hardship of those early years. "My memory's not that good," he admits. "Like, purposefully I try to forget some things." Having heard about his cautiousness in interviews, I'm taken aback by his candour. "But one thing I remembered the other day is sleeping in the stockroom of my dad's shop. He had a shop in Devon." When Cee speaks about his dad, who is of Guyanese and Chinese heritage, he does so with careful reverence. "Me and my two younger brothers and my Pops would all be in the stockroom, or sleeping in the back of his van, which is probably the shit part of the memory, but the good part was the music playing on the radio. I actually love the radio. We were listening to old-school garage, geezers chatting shit, doing shoutouts," he adds, wistfully. "I don't even know how to find them stations any more." You can detect the champagne-sipping, two-step energy of UK garage on "Moi".

At home with his mum, Cee's only access to music, other than an MP3 player loaded with a precious clutch of hip-hop classics such as Tupac's "Ghetto Gospel", was, again, the radio. He'd memorise the running order of his favourite DJs every night, from the time he finished school to midnight. "We never had the internet, no laptop, nothing," he recalls. "I'd remember music, and that's what encouraged me to make music. Because I liked music, but I couldn't listen to it." You can hear the influence of the radio in Cee's ear for infectious, memorable samples, like 2021's PinkPantheress-sampling "Obsessed With You" and 2022's "Doja", which unfolds over a pitched-up reworking of Eve and Gwen Stefani's "Let Me Blow Ya Mind". Both tracks swamped social media feeds, the latter amassing 740 million streams on Spotify. "Doja" is a prime example of how Cee has changed drill, using nostalgia to conjure feelings of warmth and security.

UK drill emerged as an urgent, youth-led grassroots movement, uncompromising in its content. It was hugely successful but also struggled beneath the weight of a moral panic, over-policing and censorship. Cee's first two mixtapes – *Wild West*, from 2021, and *23*, released a year later – were records that did drill differently: radio-friendly, yet raw. The skittering 808 drum patterns remained, but the ominous mood associated with the genre was lifted. Cee's lyrical dispatches were more aspirational than nihilistic.

"He had a distinct, unique voice," Cee's enigmatic manager Bello explains in a text message. "In rap, your voice is crucial, along with your cadence and your clarity." An early 2010s road rap OG himself, Bello reached out to Cee in 2019 after he chanced upon a video of him rapping while he was scrolling through Instagram: "The lyrical content was well thought through. He painted pictures that a wider audience could relate to or gain insight from. Stylistically, he reminded me of some of the [UK rappers that] I would consider to be the best, yet he still managed to sound completely original. It was his flow, which was unlike anything I'd heard before."

The mixtapes were commercial monsters, debuting on the UK album chart at nos 2 and 1 respectively. *Can't Rush Greatness*, with its luxurious drill-adjacent beats that incorporate everything from Brazilian baile funk to 2000s R&B, feels all but guaranteed to do the same. There are a glistening handful of guest features, which feel well earned after two full-length projects with hardly any. There are witty allusions to his increasing superstardom, like a bar on the intro about having Armenian fans, which, as an Armenian, I know will hype listeners in Yerevan. And, like a prizefighter at a face-off, there's an extra bite and belligerence to his affirmations of greatness.

"The essence is my life story and how I feel," Cee explains. "It's not about wanting to be in a big room with loads of musicians and like-minded creatives, playing real-life instruments and having mad intellectual musical conversations, all of that bullshit. I'm just there listening to beats off my phone, no producer, with the mandem who don't really give a fuck about music. The only thing that's changed, and it's a great thing…"

His thought is interrupted. The chilled house music playing over the restaurant's sound system has taken a sharp left turn. "I know this tune, you know. Do you know it?" he asks, grinning. I, for my sins, do indeed know Lil Louis' "French Kiss". Whoever is in charge of the playlist has had an absolute mare. "This is a mad tune," he adds. "Listen, she's gonna climax." On cue, the sounds of a woman orgasming over a late 1980s acid -house beat fills the dining room. It's enough to make someone choke on their grilled hispi cabbage. Someone wisely hits skip. "That's too funny!" Cee says, still smiling.

He takes a moment to gather his thoughts again. "If you live a progressive life, your life story is enough to show growth," he continues. "Man ain't gotta start adding new instruments or working with Grammy award–winning producers. I don't really care about none of that, so long as I've got something new to talk about."

On *Can't Rush Greatness*, his stream-of-consciousness flow flits between themes of bravado and paranoia, gratitude and betrayal, love and loss, with an even greater incisiveness than before. "It is sporadic and contradictive, like me," he reflects. "I'm vulnerable, innit. I want to be flawed. It's got the wittiness, the vulnerable side, and the flawed side. There's an ignorant side. And I've got more introspective stuff, too."

"I'm vulnerable, innit. I want to be flawed. It's got the wittiness, the vulnerable side, and the flawed side. I've got more introspective stuff, too."

← hoodie **CP Company** jacket, shorts and underwear **Mains**

↓ vest **Zara** sunglasses **Gentle Monster**

On this album of paradoxical feelings, one specific emotion – grief – breaches the surface intermittently, like a great whale coming up for air before disappearing underwater again. In January 2023, Cee's friend Fernando Johnson, aka FDot, was murdered near his home in Acton, west London. In the same way that he might tattoo the name of a lost friend onto his skin, or recreate their likeness in a diamond pendant, Cee makes sure that FDot's name is etched across *Can't Rush Greatness* – immortalised in a record. When listening to the album in its entirety, it strikes you that while surrounding himself with friends might help to keep Cee feel rooted, there's something that goes slightly beyond that. Does he feel safer with his mates by his side? Or, in fact, does he feel his friends are safer with him?

vest and trousers
Alexander Wang
hat
Trapstar x Ed Hardy

A WEEK LATER, Cee is in the final stages of a training session when I call him over Zoom. His routine is a combination of calisthenics and weightlifting; he's thinking of taking up boxing. ("I want to sweat more. I'm not trying to get big, I'm just trying to get fit.") His phone camera is tilted up towards his diamond-adorned earlobe. "I'm nearly finished," he says with an air of uncertainty. "Oi, Josh," he calls to his training partner, "we're not finished?" Cee is weighing up the likelihood of being able to talk in between reps. "Joining this call in 10 minutes is a bit of an inconvenience, innit... go on, let's multitask," he says, unconvincingly. I imagine Josh off-camera, shaking his head in disapproval. I suggest we circle back when he's done. "Yeah?" he asks, relieved. "Because it would be good for my mental health."

When we reconvene, Cee is thanking a barista as he grabs a coffee on his way out of the gym. Last week his aura was tranquil, mirroring the calmness of the river. Today, things feel more hectic. Soon, he will be hurried into a car and driven to Herne Hill in south London. He's supporting Umana Yana, a small family-run Guyanese takeaway restaurant in the area. The business has been campaigning for 12 years against the inexplicable decision to place five large telecommunication boxes on the pavement directly outside the shop, rendering it invisible from the roadside. The bad news: Southwark council has insisted the boxes are going nowhere. The good: Cee has donated £15,000 to the eatery. "I saw a TikTok about the restaurant. It caught my eye because there's not really many Guyanese restaurants in London," he explains. "I thought, Let me be of some help, innit." There's a family connection too; when Cee's dad lived in the area, he'd buy roti from Umana Yana. I ask if helping out is a way of honouring his roots. "Yeah, that's my people," Cee declares firmly. "It's a small community..."

"Hello," he greets someone off-camera, softening the usual authority and bass in his voice. "You all right, yeah? How are you?" he asks deferentially, the way a young person might when they bump into a teacher who was kind to them at school.

"I really admire your music," says a woman with a gentle Edinburgh accent, a little awestruck. "My son does as well." She describes how she stood in the disabled area with her son and watched Cee perform at Wireless Festival in 2021. "I love what you just did with Raye, too," she adds, as they part ways.

"Fuckin' 'ell, that's mad. That was my first Wireless," he replies. I can hear a smile spreading across his face, the warmth of memory taking hold.

That performance, in Crystal Palace Park, during which Cee stormed the festival's main stage with 40 friends all decked out in matching camo and khaki like a band of rebel guerrilleros, was a glorious middle-finger up to his past life. Four years earlier he had attended Wireless in Finsbury Park, with his brother and cousin, but was arrested after just 10 minutes, he said afterwards, for trying to "have a good time". A couple of months before getting nicked, he'd released his EP *17* to little fanfare. But on that grey, sweaty Sunday afternoon in Crystal Palace, he was still riding the wave of his *Wild West* mixtape. Chest out, confident, he performed anthems like "Commitment Issues" and "Molly", transforming tens of thousands of punters into a maelstrom of flailing limbs and joyous screams, buzzing as they witnessed the birth of a global star. At the end of his set, Cee hurled his box-fresh Nike Air Forces into the crowd, making a couple of young women shriek and swoon at the thought of taking home a piece of him.

↑
vest
Zara
jeans
Evisu
jumper
Nike
underwear
Calvin Klein
hat
Trapstar x Ed Hardy

Cee joins his friends in the car, and offers everyone iced coffees. "It's got Algarve in it, the sugar," he tells them.

"You mean 'agave'," one of his friends chimes in, playfully. "Algarve is that place in Portugal. I always get it wrong too."

"Oh yah, *agave* with the *latte*," Cee replies, with the affectation of an aristocrat in a Guy Ritchie film.

Once he's settled into his journey, I ask what those kinds of interactions with fans do, if anything, to his feeling of self-worth. "I don't really let it feed my ego," Cee says. "A million people might ask me for a picture. That can feel ungenuine. When I have a real interaction like that one just then, that's nice, innit. I could tell she was genuine. But that's rare. Maybe you could even hear that it was genuine on my side too, because I felt the love. That's something I appreciate."

"A million people might ask me for a picture. When I have a real interaction, like that one, that's nice. But that's rare. Maybe you could hear that it was genuine on my side too, because I felt the love."

TAILORING, FRANKIE FARMER. BARBERING, CORZ. GROOMING, NICOLA SVENSEN. SET DESIGN, LYNDON OGBOURNE. PRODUCTION, CHLOÉ MEDLEY.

“My brothers will always be with me, God willing. And my friends are with me too. That’s my fulfilment. If the mandem are happy, I’m happy.”

After he moved out of his mum’s when he was 14, Cee sofa surfed from Notting Hill to Cricklewood to Brighton to Ilford, sometimes not showering because he didn’t want to be a nuisance and ask to borrow a towel, never feeling comfortable. But he forged ironclad bonds with his friends in Shepherd’s Bush, built on shared experiences of exclusion, poverty and loss in their own neighbourhood, just a couple of stops on the bus from opulence and wealth. When a teenage Cee got on the number 94 at Goldhawk Road, and gazed out of the window from the top deck as it trundled through Holland Park, he set his sights on a future elsewhere. “I never stayed around,” he told me, by the river. “I was jumping on the bus, one man up. I would just do that and go back and forth. I wouldn’t even come off the bus. Sometimes I’d wake up at the bus garage back on Goldhawk Road. I would just look out the window. I’d rather that. I must’ve been tapped [crazy], innit?”

I asked him how he feels about the place now. “I love it,” he declared, and then paused for a moment. “But I don’t miss it, because I’m still with the same people. My brothers will always be with me, God willing. And my friends are with me too. In my garden, we’ve got one big Shepherd’s Bush sign. It’s like we’re in Bush.” He grabbed his phone and beckoned me closer. There, on the screen, was one of his friends, standing before the Shepherd’s Bush sign, locs down to his shoulders, sun shining down on him as he smiled broadly.

It’s the sweetest of street dreams; not simply making it out, but making it out together. “That’s my fulfilment,” Cee said. “If the mandem are happy, I’m happy.”

As our conversation draws to an end, I ask him about survivor’s guilt. Not if he feels it, because in his music it glows like a rainbow bruise, and he’s spoken of it often. You wonder if he’s found a way of making peace with the feeling. “Nah, I just don’t really think about it, innit,” Cee says. “It’s not the best way of dealing with it.”

We’re quiet for a moment. I begin to say something to interrupt the silence. But Cee continues.

“A way of dealing with it, actually, is I think very far ahead. And I do as much as I can to help the people around me, to prevent that feeling ever happening again,” he says.

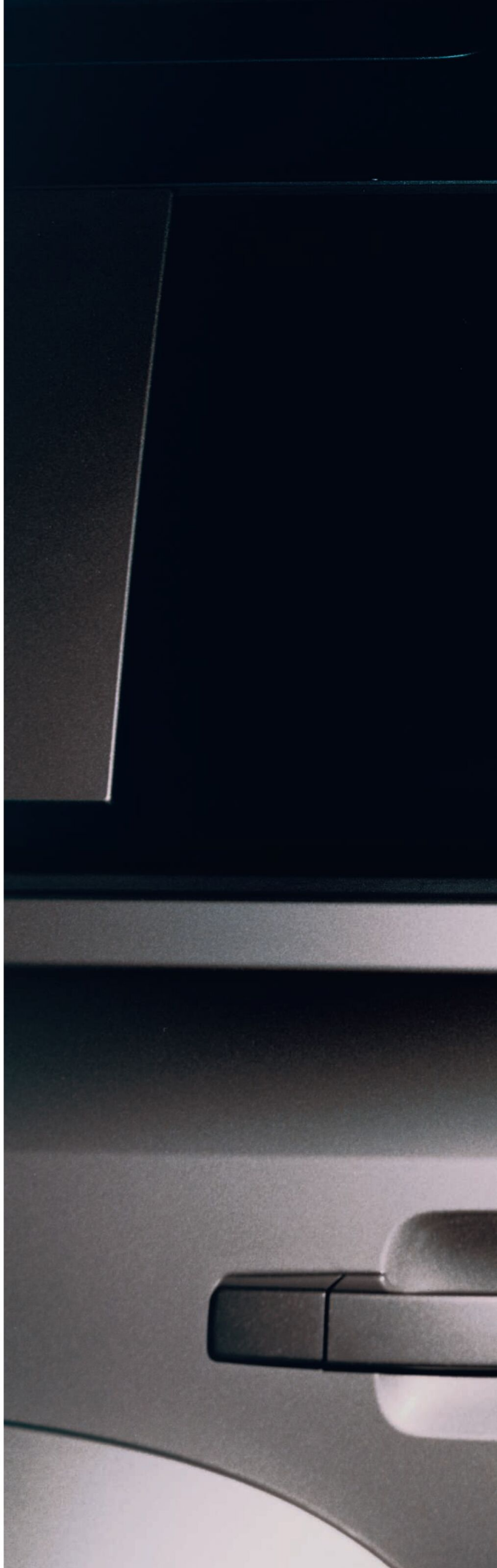
That’s why he brings them with him: to festival stages and *Fast & Furious*–style video shoots on the Champs-Élysées, to the sleepless overnight studio sessions that conjured his debut album, to our riverside hideout, and on 18-strong trips to Dubai. If he has it his way, they might soon share a bell tent on a far-flung campsite. And now they share a home where the evening birdsong isn’t drowned out by sirens. Cee has fastened their destinies to his own.

“So we’re *all* surviving, innit?”

ROBERT KAZANDJIAN *is a writer based in London.*

sunglasses
Gentle Monster

car
Defender Octa



Nicole Kidman

GQ MOTY 2024

BY BEN ALLEN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FELIX COOPER

STYLED BY KATIE GRAND

Four decades into her career, the Oscar-winning actor has become prestige TV's most reliable hitmaker. So why did she fight to make a hot, sweaty indie movie about BDSM and the liberation of female pleasure? She felt as if she didn't have a choice.

Still Feels It All

ou know what, on second thoughts, Nicole Kidman *would* like to see the meat board. We're in a white-tableclothed restaurant in London's Mayfair, and our waiter is holding a wooden slab covered in various cuts of raw beef like an offering. Kidman has no intention of ordering steak. It is just past noon; she is sleep-deprived and only recently awake, but still somehow looks like she's just emerged from the sea on an oyster shell. Nonetheless, she seems genuinely, hand-on-heart captivated by the beef. "I've never seen a meat board," she says slowly, the words sounding foreign together. "Good lord, let me see it."

The eager waiter runs her through the various cuts. We are his only customers, so he gives us the hard sell. "The Wagyu and Black Angus from Australia," he says. "And the English filet mignon on the bone," he says.

"*Woooow,*" she says. "Come *onnnn*!" Her eyes – large blue whirlpools – widen, as if watching a magician reveal the card she had placed deep in their deck. "That's beautiful." I think of Kidman's much-memed AMC cinemas ad, where she's sitting in an empty theatre, looking up at the screen like she's locking eyes with the one true love of her life.

"Are you gonna have meat?" Kidman is talking to me now. I shake my head. "Yeah," she laughs, telling the waiter, "I'm coming back here at dinnertime." You could almost believe she's not just being polite. He shuffles away, unsuccessful but satiated by the full Nicole Kidman experience.

It was jetlag that kept Kidman awake until 5am last night, finishing Miranda July's novel *All Fours* ("Talk about raw"). She has just arrived in London from her home in Nashville via the Venice Film Festival, where she premiered her new film, Halina Reijn's psychosexual drama *Babygirl*, to audiences for the first time. "[It was] terrifying," she says. "But at the same time, thrilling."

It was terrifying and thrilling because *Babygirl*, in which she plays a 50-something tech CEO in the midst of a BDSM-tinged affair with a 20-something intern, features her most vulnerable performance in years. Kidman says making it was even more challenging than 1999's fabled erotic mystery *Eyes Wide Shut*, which, for the record, she shot for over 15 gruelling months (one of the longest shoots in film history) alongside cinema's most notoriously obsessive director, Stanley Kubrick. "I'm in the whole film [in *Babygirl*]," Kidman explains. "There are so many close-ups. It's a full stripping of me."

Babygirl begins with a fake orgasm. In the first of many close-ups of Kidman's face as happily married but sexually unfulfilled Romy, she is breathing heavily, letting out soft moans. It's quite like any other climax you've seen on screen – maybe a little more believable than most. And then Romy dismounts her husband Jacob (Antonio Banderas), walks down the hall to another room, lies flat on her stomach, plays some "Daddy" porn on her laptop, sticks her hands down her pants and bites her jumper to muffle her moans as she takes herself to an *actual* orgasm.

That really is just the beginning. Romy's intern Samuel, played by ascendant young Brit Harris Dickinson, seems to understand immediately that Romy is craving something beyond the placid marital sex she's used to. At work drinks, Samuel sends her a tall glass of milk, unsolicited. He watches from across the room as she gulps it down in one, leaving white dollops on the corners of her mouth. Later, he gets her to crawl on the floor and lap milk up out of a saucer and then licks the rest off of her face. ("I love when he sends me the milk," Kidman says.) When we see Romy climaxing for real with Samuel, it puts the fraudulence of the opening performance into sharp focus: a heavy, guttural moan that seems excavated from deep within. As Kidman puts it, it feels like the stuff of "home videos", not something you send out to cinemas worldwide.

Reijn, *Babygirl*'s director, wrote the movie as a letter to herself. "I'm extremely confused and ashamed about my sexuality and about my body, and especially growing older, it's not going away," Reijn tells me. "The movie is a letter saying, 'Please try to be a little bit more at ease with the beast inside you. To look at yourself and not be grossed out.'"

Kidman, 57, has exhibited bravery on screen before, but this feels like something else entirely. One of the film's many close-ups is of Romy's forehead being injected with Botox; the lighting is harsh, and you can see into her pores. "Why do you do that to yourself?" her on-screen daughter asks her. "You look like a dead fish." There may not be anyone in the world whose face is more intensely scrutinised than Kidman's. In *Babygirl*, she seems to be saying: *Do your worst.*

It's a film intended to provoke strong reactions. Some might judge Romy; some might see themselves in her. Either way, it will make you think about the ways in which shame may have clouded your own sexual relationships. "*Yes*," Kidman says. "That's what Halina wanted."

But when it comes to actually discussing any of this stuff – on a Monday afternoon? In a restaurant? With a stranger? Come on. "I can't

← ←
OPENING PAGES
vest and skirt
Ned Sims

coat, from
Katie Grand's
personal archive
Balenciaga

→
OPPOSITE PAGE
top, trousers and
jacket, all from
Katie Grand's
personal archive
Balenciaga

even talk about that!" says Kidman, wincing, when I ask if audiences still see a woman in her 50s masturbating on screen as taboo. So instead we avoid the subject, Kidman extolling the otherworldly benefits of cold-water swimming as I wonder if I can really bring myself to say the word "squirting" in front of Nicole Kidman.

...And *Oh, thank God*, the waiter is back, and he wants to take our order. "I'm gonna have the yellowtail..." says Kidman. "Do you have some oysters? Six would be great."

I tell the waiter I'll have the exact same.

"You *what*?!" she says with a sharp laugh. "'I'll have what she's having!'"

IN MAY 2003, Kidman was at another film festival – Cannes – presenting a different challenging indie movie: Lars von Trier's *Dogville*. Two months earlier she had won an Oscar the old-fashioned way, playing an historical character with a big ol' prosthetic nose (in this case, Virginia Woolf) in *The Hours*. *Dogville* is a three-hour avant-garde nightmare in which, on a bare black set where houses are delineated by chalk drawings on the ground, Kidman's character Grace is repeatedly raped by numerous men, and in revenge incites mass murder. At the press conference, Kidman sat with her strawberry-blonde curls tied up, smiling in a black dress and a pair of cat-eye spectacles. Leaning back in her chair, she sparked up a cigarette, took a drag and exhaled, looking extremely fucking relaxed.

Back then, she seemed to be bulletproof. In just over a decade in Hollywood, she had carved out a space as one of the industry's most versatile and bankable performers, an actor as equally at home in black comedies (*To Die For*) and superhero movies (*Batman Forever*), as she was in musical blockbusters (*Moulin Rouge!*) and freaky horrors (*The Others*). She was playing in the sandpit and thriving.

"She's drawn to the radical, she's drawn to the innovative, and she's drawn to people who really inspire creatively," *The Hours* director Stephen Daldry told me. A *Vanity Fair* profile from 2002 cites Kidman's grit and commitment, rattling off injuries obtained on shoots: broken ribs, bloody knees, grossly swollen ankles. "She's fearless," Daldry continues. "I mean literally fearless. She will walk into a fast-flowing river and submerge herself as if to kill herself for real." Watching her light up that cig at the *Dogville* press conference – as I do every time the clip resurfaces on social media – it's hard to imagine that anything could rattle her.

A little over a year later, Kidman was at Venice premiering Jonathan Glazer's *Birth*, a film in which she plays a widow who believes her late husband has returned in the form of a 10-year-old boy. *Birth* was dismembered by critics, with several citing a scene in which Kidman's character bathes with said child in their outraged reviews. "[There were] lots of boos," Glazer tells me over email. "Nicole was unshakeable in her support for it, though. She had a higher understanding of it than most people at that time. She remained composed. She didn't get pulled around by any of that."

Kidman was that rare entity: a blockbuster star who still understood the need for art to be provocative and to confront uncomfortable questions. She was curious – she still is. Her husband, the musician Keith Urban, jokes that she doesn't do small talk. She'll walk away from a conversation at a dinner party knowing what the person slathers on their toast as well as their biggest fear. "He's like, 'You found all that out?'" Kidman says. "And I go, 'Didn't you ask them that?!'"

In the years after *Birth*, however, her focus shifted somewhat. "I haven't been the lead of a gritty indie film [in a while], that's true," she says. "I haven't done a *Birth* for a long time." Her life changed a lot in the mid-2000s. She started a family with Urban, whom she married in 2006, and had two daughters. "When *Moulin Rouge!* came out I was DJing at two or three in the morning," she says. "I wouldn't be doing that now. And that's a choice."

After Kidman turned 40, it began to feel like the industry was constricting around her. She found it harder to get roles that she was interested in, and feared she'd reached the "age cut-off" that so many women in Hollywood dread. Rather than quitting acting altogether (which she says she seriously considered), Kidman set up her own production company, Blossom Films, with the aim of forging a slipstream for herself and other female artists – writers, producers, directors – following in her wake. One of its first major wins was *Big Little Lies*, an HBO adaptation of Liane Moriarty's novel about a group of wealthy mothers in Monterey, California, who find themselves embroiled in a murder case. In the years since, she's perfected the beach-read-into-TV-crack pipeline, with shows like *The Undoing*, 2021's *Nine Perfect Strangers*, and this year's *The Perfect Couple*, which dominated the global Netflix charts for weeks after its release. No one does a white coastal elite whodunnit like Kidman.

"Nicole is incredibly well-read and really understands how to match directors to material," says Reese Witherspoon, her *Big Little Lies* co-star and producer. "She watches an incredible amount of emerging filmmakers' work and is very discerning about who she wants to work with. She's also always willing to take on new challenges, particularly roles that explore a unique expression of female identity."

What I'm getting at here is: Kidman could reasonably do a *Perfect Couple* per year for the next 20 years and leave it at that. So why is she taking creative risks right now – terrifying herself, even? Or, put another way: why has it taken her so long to return to the sandpit?

Partly, Kidman says, it's that while she has wanted to do something in the vein of *Babygirl* for a long time, she hasn't come across the right project. When she reads a script that she loves, a cog begins to turn inside of her.

"When *Moulin Rouge!* came out I was DJing at two or three in the morning. I wouldn't be doing that now. And that's a choice."

← vest **Ned Sims** trousers, from Katie Grand's personal archive **Balenciaga** underwear **Wacoal**

It happened with all of those wild swings in the early 2000s. "I don't see them as daring, that's the problem," she says. "Not when I read them. I just see them as like, 'Oh my God, I've got to make this.' It happened with *Birth*. The same with [*Babygirl*], and *Eyes Wide Shut*. All of them. *Dogville*."

Those scripts aren't as common in the age of algorithmic churn. "It's why there's so few good films," she tells me. "You don't read 'em. They're not financed, or they're not found; they sit on shelves or on people's computers; they don't make their way into the world."

But maybe the reason Kidman is doing this right now is less because of where the industry is, and more because of where she is as a person. Later in our conversation, we're talking about the films that make her cry. *Past Lives* was a recent one, and *Inside Out 2*. "I cry, I do," she says. "I consider myself open to emotions."

It seems like your emotions are very close to the surface.

"More so now. Even more so."

And then she goes off on a beautiful tangent about how hitting major landmarks in life over the past 20 years has connected her to her own humanity, and how the big black nothing comes into sharper focus as you hit your mid-50s and your kids grow up and your parents die. Why does she feel everything all the more now, at the age of 57? Well: "Mortality. Connection. Life coming and hitting you. And loss of parents and raising children and marriage and all of the things that go into making you a fully sentient human. I'm in all of those places. So life is, whew. It's definitely a journey. And it hits you as you get older how –" she takes a sharp, dramatic breath "– it's a wake up at 3am crying and gasping kind of thing. If you're in it and not numbing yourself to it. And I'm in it. Fully in it."

And you start to see that perhaps Nicole Kidman isn't fearless at all.

"Mortality. Connection. Life coming and hitting you. And loss of parents and raising children and marriage and all of the things that go into making you a fully sentient human. I'm in all of those places. Life is definitely a journey."

OUR WAITER HAS returned, this time with two plates decorated with thin strips of yellowtail sashimi, and a ludicrously large silver vat of oysters. We both ignore the chopsticks and eat the sushi the undignified way: with a fork.

Kidman is talking about the process of acting. She doesn't like to analyse her work too much ("The dissecting becomes icky. It feels a bit up yourself or something… Do you have that term here, 'up yourself'?"). But while she feels a little queasy about labelling her process as "method", she agrees that is probably the most accurate word for it. "I'm willing to go to whatever place to make it real and deep," she says, "and certain things just click and it's cellular."

What this means in practice is that she has to really feel everything her character feels – otherwise, it won't deliver the emotional gut-punch needed. "You can absolutely tell when people are phoning something in," she says. "For me, that doesn't work. I'm not moved by that." When the camera stops rolling, she doesn't just get to slip off her costume and walk away. Any negative feelings linger in her subconscious. "I get sick or I get disturbed," Kidman says. "It penetrates my dreams, I don't sleep well, I shake, I have all sorts of different physical manifestations from it."

Kidman knows, of course, that it's not real. But the effects can be. "Your body is just going, Oh right, this is happening, and I'm responding as anyone does to stress," she says. So, when Kidman is exploring the psychology of a domestic abuse victim, as she did as Celeste in *Big Little Lies*, it can take its toll. "[It] was pretty shattering," she says. "It short-circuits your brain."

→
coat, skirt and shoes, all from Katie Grand's personal archive
Balenciaga

Babygirl affected her just like this. The nightmares, the middle-of-the-night heart palpitations. And it's not all that surprising, having seen the film. Romy is hungry and horny and ashamed, and her desire is so great that giving into it could destroy her husband and devastate her children. That's a lot for any subconscious to take.

Reijn has seen how this affects Kidman first-hand. "Seeing her act for me is like an exorcism," she says. "She goes beyond ego, beyond sanity and beyond fear… It's not that she's not afraid, you know, she's super afraid, but she still goes there."

There's a flipside to this process: sometimes Kidman's life ends up feeding her work. Years ago, in a talk at the Women in the World conference in London, she said it fascinated her that her performances in the immediate aftermath of her divorce in 2001 were "applauded". She was referring primarily to *The Hours*, for which she won the Academy Award. "One of the challenges that she had during *The Hours* is that she was in the middle of this emotional trauma," says Daldry. "So she was especially vulnerable, she was especially emotionally available, and went on a real journey with me. I think one of the ways that she survived that process was to submerge herself into the world of Virginia Woolf and become obsessive about the work. I think it was a way to blank out the emotional trauma in her private life, investing all of that energy and all of that hurt into the role."

Looking back, does she feel like her performance was impacted – improved, even – by the fact that she was going through such a difficult time? "That's otherworldly stuff. I think that [was] my youth speaking," Kidman says. "The subconscious and the subliminal is a weird thing."

Or take *Expats*, Lulu Wang's miniseries from earlier this year, in which Kidman plays a mother whose three-year-old son goes missing in Hong Kong. In the show's most shattering scene, her character Margaret is presented with the body of a child in the morgue who matches her son's description. Before the sheet is lifted, Margaret's face melts into a Joker-esque fit of searing laughter. This was a bit of improv, inspired by one of the most difficult moments in Kidman's life, when her father died in 2014. She had a similar reaction when she saw his body in the coffin for the first time. "I literally started laughing because I was so grief-stricken and so devastated," she told *Elle* earlier this year. "My body and my psyche just couldn't handle it."

It's not a choice, she says, but her own experiences do filter in. "It's all there, everything is there," Kidman says, between oysters, meaning, everything that she has gone through in life – the good and the bad – can inform her work. "[My emotions] have to be coming out in some way."

←
OPPOSITE PAGE
coat, from
Katie Grand's
personal archive
Balenciaga

THIS PAGE
top and skirt
Jawara Alleyne

boots, from
Katie Grand's
personal archive
Balenciaga

dress and boots
Balenciaga

"Your body is just going, Oh, right, this is happening, and I'm responding as anyone does to stress. It short-circuits your brain."

KIDMAN LAUGHS A LOT. She laughs at the end of most of sentences. She laughs when I spend a little too long considering a question ("Because you go, 'Hmmmm,'" she says, putting a finger to her lips and looking off into the distance). She laughs when the waiter drops some unsolicited miniature burgers down on the table ("Do you want a slider? *Ahaha. Noooo.*").

As our plates are cleared, Kidman orders a skimmed-milk cappuccino. When it arrives, she administers a modest dose of sugar and proceeds to play with the froth, stirring the milk back and forth, into itself and over itself, licking the back of the spoon, eating what is ostensibly a beverage like an ice cream.

"I love wind," she says. She's looking out towards the edge of Hyde Park, watching leaves being whipped around.

You love wind?

"Yesss."

What about it?

"I don't know, I just love it. 'Cause it's another force coming from somewhere else. And it comes in all different – sometimes it's a breeze and sometimes it's a tempest. I love it."

In this moment, I say, it is impossible not to think of a particular Nicole Kidman meme (of which there are many): she's probably in her early 30s, and she's standing on the pavement in a pink top, basking in the sunlight, her eyes closed, her arms out, her mouth open as if she's letting out a deep sigh of relief. Does she know the one I'm talking about?

"Yes," she says. "That was not me; that was from a film, that wasn't real life. I know that image!"

The story that goes with this meme whenever it circulates is that Kidman had just

left her lawyer's office after the dissolution of her first marriage. "That's not true," she laughs. "I've also seen the one where I'm clapping like that." She begins to clap as I've seen her clap dozens of times in gif form, with her fingers pointed backwards and only her palms meeting. "'Cause I had a massive heavy borrowed ring on and it was really painful, and I was scared of wrecking the jewellery. Ha! There's always something behind the actual images that go out there, right?"

What about the one where she's stood, mouth agape, in the front row at the Oscars? The usual line – later debunked – is that this was her reaction to Will Smith slapping Chris Rock.

"Yesss," she laughs again.

And then, of course there's the aforementioned AMC ad, a "get back to the movies" plea filmed during the pandemic and subsequently held up by film Twitter for its endearing strangeness, which has solidified her place as a guardian of the cinematic experience.

"Yeah, yeah," she says. "'Heartbreak feels good in a place like this.' But I'll do anything for cinema, so you can meme me as much as you want."

THE WAITER RETURNS and places a plate of miniature chocolate-chip cookies on the table in between us. It sits there for a minute, untouched. "You don't want a cookie?" Kidman says, with a smile.

I do, actually, but I'm not going to be the guy who beats Nicole Kidman to the cookie plate.

"That's a line from the movie," she says. "Don't you remember it?" I realise she's making a joke about a crucial moment in *Babygirl*, where Harris Dickinson's Samuel upends the boss-employee power dynamic. I turn the question back on her.

"Sure, I'll have a cookie." She grabs one off the plate and breaks off a segment.

This year has seen a run of movies, including *The Idea of You* and *I Want Your Sex*, featuring relationships between an older woman and a younger man. Vulture has dubbed this the "New Milf Cinema". Kidman has starred in two of them: *Babygirl* and Netflix's *A Family Affair*, opposite Zac Efron. The two projects were filmed a couple of years apart, Kidman tells me, and the release proximity is incidental. Besides, she's not bothered by people moralising about age-gap relationships. "My thing is, well, it's been done for years the other way around, so really there should be a lot more of these stories," she says. "It shouldn't be, like, 'What a shock!' It happens. So let's put it on screen. And that's that."

Hollywood in the post–Me Too era has struggled with showing sex on film (this has coincided with a 40 per cent drop in sexual content on screen since 2000, according to film data analyst Stephen Follows). But this past year, those winds seem to be shifting, with festivals once again stocked with films like *Challengers*, *Queer*, and yes, *Babygirl*, to which the depiction of sex is absolutely integral. Does Kidman feel like sex has a place on screen? "I'm not a huge fan of massive blanket statements," she says. "No, you're not gonna wanna sit there and see sex that's exploitative. It's gotta be looked at and dissected and it's consent and there's all those things around that. But we are human, and it is a huge part of who we are."

Up to this point, we've been avoiding the meat of what made *Babygirl* so challenging for her. When we circle the specifics of the film's more intimate scenes, Kidman steers the conversation towards praising her collaborators. It's clear that she finds it difficult to talk specifically about her performance in the film.

"Yes!" she says, laughing again. "Can you tell? I don't know what to say. But I love it. I love the film, so I don't want to deny it or put it down. There's times where you're like, 'I don't love this film. We tried and it didn't quite get there and I don't love it.' I love [*Babygirl*]."

She loves it, she tells me, "because of what it talks about and what it stands up for and what it allows people to discuss", even when it is difficult. "I made it because in my body of work, I needed to do this," she says. "It's part of what I do. I've never shied away from sexuality on screen, ever... [Reijn] wanted to make a film about liberation, female pleasure. And I wanted to do that! I wanted to do that. 'Cause I've done a lot of films where I've been punished. I've done those films where you really don't get the pleasure from it. Where you don't get to see the woman actually go..." She exhales deeply here, a sigh signifying a release of tension. "A lot of times these films are very punishing. The woman gets discarded in the end or she gets turned around and she has to beg on her knees."

It is not a movie that she could have made with a male director. "My skin changes colour in it. I blush, I sweat, and [Reijn] captures all of it because she understands it and knows it," she says. During filming, Reijn would hold her – physically hold her – in between intensely intimate scenes when she felt too exposed. "That's a very, very deep thing to experience. It's a relationship where you go, 'I trust you. Please don't hurt me.'"

Dickinson saw how this anxiety affected Kidman on set. "I think we both were [scared] with every scene, regardless of intimacy," he says. "And I think we were both always just like, 'What the fuck do we do here? Like, how does this go?' So, yeah, it was kind of reassuring to know that she was equally as troubled as me or scared as me."

In her recent TV roles, like *The Perfect Couple*, Kidman has appeared icy and flawless – shot reverentially, decked out in wigs and make-up. But *Babygirl* strips off the veneer, showing instead someone whose armour has been removed, whose body and every insecurity are on full show. "That is vulnerable. Insanely vulnerable," she says. "But I really would like to be able to open the door on this and not to be shamed, punished or hurt because of it."

"You have to be very secure in yourself in order to do something like this," says Banderas. "If you are even a little bit insecure it would be impossible."

Susanne Bier, who directed Kidman in *The Undoing* and *The Perfect Couple*, noted this quality in Kidman, too. "She is devoid

"I made *Babygirl* because in my body of work, I needed to do this. Reijn wanted to make a film about female pleasure. And I wanted to do that! 'Cause I've done a lot of films where I've been punished."

→
vest
Ned Sims
trousers, from
Katie Grand's
personal archive
Balenciaga

of vanity," Bier says. "I think she doesn't care about her looks. She's obviously beautiful, but that doesn't really interest her. And that makes her interesting as an actress because it means that she will go full-on [for] a part. She'd do anything."

As you age as an actor, Kidman says, "the risk becomes deeper and harder". An example: in 1998, right after filming *Eyes Wide Shut*, she performed in Sam Mendes' *The Blue Room* at London's Donmar Warehouse – an adaptation of the 1897 Arthur Schnitzler play *La Ronde* – in which both she and co-star Iain Glen appeared fully nude. She barely noticed the nerves: "When you're really young, you're just going, Oh, I'll give it a go." Conversely, starring in Anna Ziegler's play *Photograph 51* in 2015, she was overcome with anxiety. "I was terrified," she says. "And I remember thinking, I didn't feel like this when I was doing *The Blue Room*. What the hell is this feeling? And it was full-on nerves. So much more intense."

Time does that to you. You become more aware of the consequences of failure. Kidman used to enjoy riding around on motorcycles. She smoked cigarettes, too. She doesn't do either any more. With that in mind, would it be easier to just forget about the difficult stuff and continue to be Nicole Kidman in a digestible, six-episode-murder-mystery kind of way? What makes her want to keep doing this?

For once, she doesn't laugh at all. "Wanting to be a part of the world," she says. "Examining this life and why we're all here and what it's all about. I get to work with the most extraordinary people in the world, and share ideas and philosophies and be changed. God, why wouldn't you wanna do it if you can?"

I'll let Meryl Streep put it another way. "People call it bravery when an actress bares all and leaps off into the unknown, [when] she dives deep into the darker parts of what it is to be a human being," Streep said in April, as she presented Kidman with the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award. "But I don't think it's bravery. I think it's love. I think she just loves it. And I think that's the greatest attribute an actor can have."

Maybe Kidman really didn't give a fuck in the early 2000s when she was making the kinds of movies that people booed at film festivals. But she's not fearless any more – no one is, really, once life has made its mark. And that is perhaps why it's taken her a while to get back in the sandpit, why *Babygirl* was more daunting than *Eyes Wide Shut* – because with each passing day, she feels everything more intensely: the fear, the embarrassment, the awkwardness of putting yourself out there. But she goes ahead and does it anyway.

THERE'S ANOTHER KIDMAN meme that we didn't get a chance to talk about. It's a screenshot of a feature in the *LA Times* about Reese Witherspoon, an anecdote Kidman told the interviewer. They were passing time in make-up on the set of *Big Little Lies*. While Witherspoon wanted to grill her about working with Kubrick and Baz Luhrmann, Kidman had other things on her mind. "Do you ever think about dying, Reese?" she would ask. "'Cause I think about it all the time."

> "I get to work with the most extraordinary people in the world, and share ideas and philosophies and be changed. God, why wouldn't you wanna do it if you can?"

And as a meme, completely out of context, that's funny – sure. But from speaking to Kidman, there seems to be some real pain behind it. Her father's passing in 2014, when her kids were still so young, made a mark on her. "There's the mortality aspect of life which, when you start to deal with that, it's very heavy," she says. "When you're raising children you're like, I gotta stay here. I wanna see all of this. It's devastating and beautiful and extraordinary."

← vest and skirt **Ned Sims**

Several years after her father's death, she was at home with her mother and they discovered a CD of her father singing. Her mother refused to listen to it, as she would find it too painful. But Kidman had to. "It was like being stabbed in the gut," she told *The New York Times*. "I left it on."

She can't help but stare into the void from time to time. In fact, she makes a point of it. It makes Kidman more acutely aware of how important it is to engage with the world around her; and the best way she knows how to do that is through her art.

A week after our lunch, Kidman's mother died, aged 84. The news broke as she was awarded the Volpi Cup for Best Actress at the Venice Film Festival. Accepting the award on her behalf, Reijn read out Kidman's words: "The collision of life and art is heartbreaking. And my heart is broken."

When we met, Kidman told me another story from a few days after her father died. She was with her daughters, who were four and six at the time. She was devastated and crying. "The little one was just so little that she didn't know whether I was acting or not. She said, 'Mummy acting now?' And the older one was like, 'No, mummy not acting now.'" She says this with a different, wearier laugh. "But the older one was like, 'You won't be sad in the morning?' Because they don't want a house full of sadness. Who does?"

It was a reminder that she needed to rally for their sakes. She needed to work through the pain. "And before you know it, you're pushing through," she says. "And by pushing through for them, you're getting better. Because it goes on. That natural line of how it's meant to go. The parents, then you, then the children. That's the natural course. So if that happens, that's a blessing."

This anecdote led her to talk about *Rabbit Hole* – the 2010 indie film she produced and starred in about losing a child – and why she made it. It's a fascinating choice, to have done that movie when she did. Because knowing how she works, she would have been going through hell. "I had to make it because I had my child, and I was like, 'OK, now I've got to make a film that somehow deals with the most devastating possibility that other people have had to go through,'" she says. "It was awful making it, but I wanted to make it because there are people out there living that experience and I wanted to reach out to them and go, 'Here's something for you, and you're loved and understood.'

"It's a lifeline. Even *Babygirl* in a weird way is a lifeline. It's like, it's OK. It's OK. You know? You can still be loved for the deepest parts of who you are."

BEN ALLEN *is culture editor of* BRITISH GQ.

TAILORING, ALISON O'BRIEN. HAIR, ADIL ABERGEL. MAKE-UP, GUCCI WESTMAN. MANICURE, EMILY ROSE LANSLEY. PRODUCTION ASSISTANT, MARTIN EITO.

KOBBIE MAINOO & COLE PALMER ARE JUST GETTING STARTED

STYLED BY MARTIN METCALF

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAN MARTENSEN

BY OLIVER FRANKLIN-WALLIS

This summer, as the Three Lions once again brushed maddeningly close to glory, two players grabbed the nation's attention: Kobbie Mainoo, Manchester United's 19-year-old midfield prodigy, and Cole Palmer of Chelsea, the Premier League's most cold-blooded breakout. As it happens, they became friends along the way.

1. The Subs

IGNORE, FOR NOW, how it ended. Cast your mind back instead to the 70th minute of this summer's men's Euros final – a moment that, for England at least, represented a demarcation, a fulcrum, a… sure, why not, a *vibe shift*. A moment that at the time seemed so prosaic you probably barely noticed. With 20 minutes left to play, the Three Lions having trailed for most of the second half, Gareth Southgate made an uncharacteristic substitution. He took off Kobbie Mainoo.

Mainoo, the 19-year-old who in his first senior tournament had forced his way into the England starting lineup and definitively solved a quandary that had plagued Southgate for months: who to accompany Jude Bellingham and Declan Rice at the heart of midfield. (Alexander-Arnold? Gallagher? Wharton? No.) Mainoo, who having only just finished his first season as a starter for Manchester United, grabbed hold of that midfield spot like a prime Paul Scholes, spraying passes (*forward* passes!), muscling off opponents, and carrying the ball head-up, with a cocksureness downright unreasonable for someone his age. Watching Mainoo during the tournament, you couldn't help but feel feelings long forgotten among England fans: certainty. *Calm*.

For 69 minutes of the final in Berlin, Mainoo and his teammates had toiled against the relentless Spanish. Then, a goal down and with time running out, Southgate decided to switch the safety off. He decided to bring on Cole Palmer.

It was as if Southgate had finally heard the nation's prayers (OK, epithets). In less than a year, Palmer had gone from a semi-permanent piece of Manchester City's dugout furniture to tearing up the Premier League at Chelsea, putting up numbers – 22 league goals, 11 assists – greater than even Blues legends like Eden Hazard ever produced in a single season. Palmer, whose dead-eyed finishing and merciless technique already had fans referring to him not by name, but by his supposedly ectothermic blood type: Cold. And yet for England, he had hardly featured. Palmer came on against Switzerland and scored the opening penalty in the shootout; he came on against the Netherlands in the semis and set up Ollie Watkins' winner. But generally, Southgate had kept him benched for the sake of his preferred option on the right, Bukayo Saka. (This is not to besmirch Saka; one could opine here upon the merits of Southgate's decisions, but enough column inches have been wasted on that exercise already. Besides, we're in the Tuchel era now.)

Anyway: 70th minute, Palmer comes on. 73rd minute, Palmer scores.

It's still a sumptuous goal. Palmer receives the layoff from Bellingham maybe 22 yards out and hits it hard and low and sweet. Watching it back, you can't help but relive the instant the whole stadium, the whole country, went absolutely crazy.

"I've watched it all back[his goal in the Euros final], but it's one of those things that happened so fast you don't really remember it." **Cole Palmer**

←←

OPENING PAGES
ON KOBBIE
jacket, shorts, socks, shoes and chain
Louis Vuitton
vest
Geordie Campbell
ON COLE
jacket
Hermès
polo neck
Ahluwalia

top
Geordie Campbell
jeans
Ami
shoes
Clarks

OPPOSITE PAGE
ON KOBBIE
jacket
Solid Homme
shirt and trousers
Louis Vuitton
tie
Ami
ON COLE
jacket
CP Company x Robyn Lynch
trousers
Zegna
shirt
Dior Men

Mainoo, by then watching from the sidelines, remembers it well: "I ran to the byline, told Cole to do my celebration as well – which he did," Mainoo says. "I was gassed."

But for Palmer, trying to recall perhaps the most historic highlight of a broadly unforgettable year? "It all happened so fast," Palmer says, scratching his neck. "Obviously, I've watched it all back, the highlights and that… but it's one of those things that happened so fast you don't really remember it."

It's October, and the pair are sharing a rare mid-season chance to hang out, making jokes and eating Nando's at a north London photography studio. Although both players grew up a few miles apart on the south side of Manchester, they hadn't really spent much time together before being called up for England this summer. One of the happier outcomes of the tournament is that they became friends over intensely competitive games of mid-camp padel.

"He's actually good," Palmer says. "I'm better at table tennis, he's better at padel."

"You don't believe that," Mainoo says. "Table tennis!?"

"I'd even say both, but I'll let you have one." (This kind of competitive banter is incessant; you sense they could make a sport of watching dust settle.)

After the final whistle in Berlin – if you're somehow in the centre of the miniscule Venn diagram of "people reading this cover story" and "people who don't know the result", England lost 2-1 – both players happened to be randomly selected for drug testing. "Just me and Cole," Mainoo says. So off they went together, bodies exhausted, eyes puffy, to give the only things they hadn't left on the field for their country: piss and blood. "We did that, and then we went back to the hotel, saw the families, and in the morning we were gone."

And here's the thing: you can read that and take away the memory of bitter disappointment: two players' improbable breakout years dashed by one final, crushing anticlimax. Or, with a little distance, you can look back at that 70th minute substitution – the most exciting young forward in the Premier League coming on for the most exciting young midfielder in the Premier League, both at the very start of their careers, both of them English – and feel electrified, knowing the horizon has never looked brighter.

jacket
Dior Men
sweatshirt
Martine Rose

2. Kobbie

IT TELLS YOU how crazy Mainoo's breakout year has been that, until very recently, he was still living with his parents. For the whole of his wild and strange season he'd spend the day exhilarating Old Trafford, or some distant away stadium, then come home quietly to crash out at his mum's or dad's like any other teenager. But this autumn, after the Euros, he finally got the keys to his own place. "I moved in like, two or three days ago," Mainoo says, opening the door to a spacious family home on the outskirts of the city. The walls are grey and bare, the living room set up with just the essentials: a squidgy corner sofa, a TV, his PS5.

It's somehow still less than a year since Mainoo made his first Premier League start for United, a 3-0 win away to Everton last November. Even that may not have happened if not for a calf injury to his teammate Mason Mount; his loss our collective gain. Mainoo had just come back off the medical table himself, and remembers being nervous. "Before the game I got a few butterflies," he says. "It was a big opportunity, so I just tried to prepare myself the best way possible." It worked: Mainoo dominated the game, and although his teammate Alejandro Garnacho took home the Player of The Match award, all the commentators were talking about Mainoo. (Gary Neville: "[He was] Manchester United's best player by a street.")

What's remarkable is that during those early matches Mainoo didn't seem to grow in stature so much as arrive, fully formed. Sure, there were moments of spectacle – a curling strike against Liverpool; a twisting, meg-and-run Goal of the Month against Wolves – but what really stood out was something that statistics struggle to show. At 18, he looked totally at ease.

Mainoo was born in Stockport, to Ghanaian parents, and coming up through the local youth teams he was already known for this preternatural poise; Chris Pheiffer, his junior school PE teacher, once said that he was dribbling with his head up aged eight. As a kid, he would play as a striker or a number 10, something you can still see in his attacking mindset. "I feel like in some ways it helps, in some ways it doesn't," Mainoo smiles. "In terms of going forward with the ball, definitely. [But] then if it's receiving the ball, like, my body position, sometimes I still do it as if I'm a striker, where I should be doing something else. So it's just trying to find the balance."

Mainoo knows he's still raw ("the [former] manager [Erik ten Hag] is very demanding, he's always wanted more") so he watches midfield legends for ways to improve his own game. "I like to watch Busquets, the way he used to turn. Players like Seedorf, Modric. Players like Yaya Touré – I like the way he used to play." That might help to explain perhaps Mainoo's standout characteristic for England; what coaches call "press resistance", but a layman might call fearlessness. When more conservative players might pass backwards and play things safe, Mainoo strides forward. "I don't think about it too much," he says. "It's more an in-the-moment type of thing. Like if I check" – his head owl-pivots over his left shoulder to demonstrate – "I see a guy here, then I'll turn this way. Or if I don't have to do that, I can just bounce out. I don't think, like, I'm gonna turn here… it's more that if the defender gives me an option, then I'm gonna take it."

Manchester United limped to an eighth-placed finish in the league in 23/24 – a humiliation by the club's historic standards. Amid the turmoil surrounding Old Trafford (in February, the British chemicals billionaire Jim Ratcliffe bought a 27.7 per cent stake in the club for about £1.25 billion, and assumed sporting control) Mainoo was one of the few bright spots, alongside a clutch of young talent – Garnacho, Rasmus Højlund – that then-manager ten Hag had bet his future on. "He was performing consistently well in the side that wasn't performing consistently well," England legend and *Match of The Day* presenter Gary Lineker told me. "That's when you look at players and think that they might have something very special."

In a league where big clubs tend to spend huge rather than promote academy players, Mainoo credits United for giving him the chance. "I feel like at United it's very much in the history that they play young players, going all the way back to the Busby Babes," Mainoo says. "There's big writing up on the wall [at Carrington, the training ground] saying, 'If they're good enough, they're old enough.'"

That bet seems to be largely paying off. In May, United beat Manchester City to win the FA Cup Final, in what was – in a sign of the times – seen as a major upset. Mainoo, naturally, scored the winner. "I remember just the feeling around it was like, no one expects us to win," he says. "They've just written us off. I used that as motivation."

The images of that triumph – Mainoo posing with the Cup in a red devil bucket hat, beaming with his family – were all over social media afterwards. "I won't say it made the season a success for us as a team, but we definitely needed it. We couldn't go into the summer with nothing, just finishing where we finished in the table," he says. "A trophy brings hope. But it definitely didn't make the season a success."

> "I feel at United it's very much in the history that they play young players, going all the way back to the Busby Babes." **Kobbie Mainoo**

3. Cole

IT SEEMS ODD to think about now, but Cole Palmer's miraculous season almost didn't happen. "I wasn't even gonna go [to] Chelsea," Palmer says. "I got persuaded." (Who persuaded him? He nods towards his manager.)

What he did know for sure is that he wanted to leave Manchester City, the club that had nurtured him since he was seven. "I just knew I wasn't going to play as much as I wanted to. Even when I was going to England [camps] with younger age groups, you had players there who were playing in the league every week. And you're looking around thinking, I can play in the league." Palmer, already known on social media for his dry humour and understated delivery, sums it up with a shrug. "When you're not playing, it's annoying."

We're talking at a hotel close to the Chelsea training ground in Cobham, Surrey, where Palmer has been dutifully signing kits and merchandise for competition winners; the less glamorous side of the job. (Given his newfound love for

shirt
Stefan Cooke

jacket
Solid Homme
shirt
Louis Vuitton
tie
Ami

padel, I'd assumed he was here for the hotel's court. When I told him the hotel had one, he lit up. "What, they've got padel here?!")

Palmer eventually joined Chelsea on deadline day, for £40 million. Pep Guardiola later claimed that Palmer had been agitating for a move for two years. "No – do you know what, I just wanted to go on loan," he says. But when it became clear that he wasn't going to be among City's starters, even after the departure of Riyad Mahrez to Saudi Arabia, he decided he had to leave. To place his faith in himself.

"I remember training on a Wednesday at City in the afternoon, and the news was 'they're trying to agree a fee,'" he says. "Every time the ball went out I'd ask the kit man or the doctor if they've agreed the fee yet." But the deal dragged on, as deals do, and most people went home. "So I didn't really get a chance to see many people and say I'm going. I just had to get my stuff." That's the mercenary reality of football at the top level: no goodbyes, except what can be said over text. "I messaged the group chat, said 'Thanks and everything. I'm gone.' That was it."

During the first half of last season, as Palmer's performances for Chelsea went from 'huh, maybe this kid can play', to 'City were silly to sell him' to 'where did this guy come from?', he watched the growing discussion around him online. "I'd see people saying, like, 'He's just in good form,'" he says. "Then I think it was after the first England camp where I went a bit quiet, and people were saying, 'This was always going to happen.' But then I just picked up and went even better. Played Middlesbrough at home, played Everton, United at home, and I just kept scoring, scoring, scoring."

As weeks passed, and winter turned into spring, Palmer kept scoring. Penalties, sure (as his teammate Noni Madueke put it, "that's why they call him Cold Palmer, innit") but also sweeping assists, and goals of ridiculous skill, like the mazy, humiliating pass-and-move he scored against Everton. "I knew I could do it," Palmer says. "But for it to happen so fast… I surprised myself, yeah."

For defenders, Palmer is a daunting prospect. He's quick, strong, and at 6ft 1in, taller than most. Where other wingers exploit their speed – knocking the ball past opponents, always playing the game at a sprint – he's more likely to slow down, to floor his marker with a toss of the shoulders or a sudden turn, buying the half second needed to make a pass or get a shot away. "His decision making is extraordinarily mature for a young footballer," says Lineker. "He makes the right calls, when to pass, when not, when to go for gold himself – and his finishing is extraordinary."

Palmer's misleadingly laconic style stems in part from being a scrawny kid. "Maybe because I wasn't the quickest when I was younger, I had to use body movement instead of speed," he says. "I remember I would say, 'I want to be fast, I want to be stronger, bigger', because I was so small – like, just tiny. I would try and do something and I'd just get the ball took off me. I said, 'Why am I like this?' And my dad said: 'Wait. You will take over everybody.'"

Palmer grew up in Wythenshawe, south of the city. It was his father, Jermaine, who would take him to football, teaching him in the park how best to shoot, how to protect the ball. Jermaine's parents hail from Saint Kitts and Nevis, which is why Cole wears the island nation's flag on his boots. Palmer has said in other interviews that one of his first memories is of them playing together. "He messaged me the other day, after I scored that chip versus Wolves, saying, 'You remember practising chips in the park?" Palmer says. (That goal, a first-time lob from outside the box, came as part of a 6-2 thrashing; Palmer also got three assists.) "But I actually do, to be fair."

Over time, as the league and eventually the world got wind of Palmer's exploits, his DMs would light up with missives of support. "[David] Beckham messaged me," he says. "I scored one day, and I saw him in my DMs.'" (*Were you the right age to watch Beckham?* "Not really. I was a bit young.")

The attention, he says, was unsettling. "It was strange. When I first would score or something, [I'd be] like proper gassed and excited, I'd look at my phone. But now the more it's happened, I realise people just talk. I don't read into it." Thanks to his lively persona – rapping on his sister's TikTok to Vybz Kartel, or joining the opposing team's huddle during the Chelsea-City game as a prank – Palmer has become something of a meme player, the subject of countless YouTube mashups and TikTok clips. "Sometimes it's annoying," he says. "To keep seeing yourself."

4. Kobbie

MAINOO WAS AT Saint George's Park with the England U-21s when he was called up for the Euros. "I remember people telling me 'congratulations' and stuff. I didn't realise the squad had been released," he says. Once at the training camp in Blankenhain, the team settled in, he and Palmer often hanging out with Phil Foden and Adam Wharton. "There were loads of activities and stuff for us to do, it was a good group of guys. So it wasn't always talking about football. Just laughing, jokes, messing about – what we do if you're at home," he says. "Off the pitch was pretty chilled. I enjoyed it."

Still, it was hard for him, sitting on the bench for the first two games against Serbia and Denmark, as England struggled to gel. "I was just itching to get on," he says. Even harder was not paying attention to the discourse surrounding England – and particularly Southgate – after the stuttering first few games. "I mean, it's hard not to see it, you have a phone. It's everywhere," Mainoo says. "So it was like, brush it off. People talk just to talk. And the manager made it a big thing, to like, 'Forget what they're saying, it's just about us. You have to go out and play. You have to win games, that's what it's all about.'"

The game he remembers most, paradoxically, is not the final, but the semi against the Netherlands. On the bus to the stadium, he says, "all you could see was just orange. All the streets were orange." The match was played at the Signal Iduna Park, Borussia Dortmund's stadium, often compared to Anfield for its cauldron-like atmosphere. "The Yellow Wall [Dortmund's famed packed south stand] was completely orange. It's a long, dark, thin tunnel, walking out to the pitch, and when we got out there it was smoky. The atmosphere was crazy. Bouncing. It was just unbelievable." Amid all that noise, all a young player can try and do is keep their head. "I was taking every game as it was coming, trying to perform my best. And then if I played well, it was on to the next one. Play again, play well again. Next one. You know?"

Play again, win again – until somehow, there was the prospect of maybe winning the whole thing. "The feeling of winning games and getting closer and closer and closer and being this close." Until they weren't.

> "The manager made it a big thing, like, 'Forget what they're saying, it's just about us. You have to go out and play. You have to win.'" **Kobbie Mainoo**

ON COLE
suit
Burberry

jumper
Stefan Cooke x Solid Homme

ON KOBBIE
suit
Burberry

vest
Ami

tracksuit
Denzil Patrick
shirt
Rowing Blazers
trainers and
socks
Nike

5. Cole

DESPITE THE HIGHS of his club season – in August, he was awarded PFA Young Player of The Year – when Palmer arrived at the Euros, it was like going back in time. Suddenly, he was back on the bench, watching as other players stumbled. "It was frustrating at England, to be fair," he says. "Not to say that the players aren't good. But just coming off the back of the season I had, the form I was in, everything I was doing was coming off… so I'm not playing in the first two games even when the team was struggling, it was a bit like, Why? Do you know what I mean?"

The effect, of course, was that when he did get onto the field, Palmer had a point to prove. "If you bring me on [in] the third game and I don't do anything, then I can't really say anything," he says. "I just had to try and force my way in." You could see the hunger when he did get on; setting up Ollie Watkins' winner in the semi-final, pressing intensely, always a threat.

Still, when the final came, he found himself again on the bench. "I remember Watkins coming on, and I was thinking, Why not me?" So when he finally did come on to replace Mainoo, it felt like deliverance. "I had a feeling I was going to score," he says. "Even in the hotel the night before the game, I was just looking at the mirror, just thinking, What am I gonna do if I score? Am I gonna do my celebration? Am I just going to go mad?"

Losing hurt; all of us felt it. But the feeling, strange as it is to say, is a relatively unusual experience for Palmer, having spent most of his life playing for one of history's most dominant teams. In his final season in Manchester, City won the treble – the League, Champions League and FA Cup. But he, of course, rarely featured, and recently, Palmer passed on his trophies and medals. "I give them to my mum," he says. "I wanted to restock. Clear them out so I can stock up again." He kept his Chelsea Player of the Year award, and the PFA award from last season. But the rest is space, for the future. "The feeling you get when you win… you just want it again. You don't want to stop and never get that feeling again."

6. The Starters

AT THE STUDIO, the photographs are done, and the clothes are being packed back into trunks. Mainoo, who is increasingly into menswear ("Enfants Riches Déprimés… Chrome Hearts, Bottega") seems at home amid the racks of clothing and watches. Palmer, less so.

"I just wear trackies," he says.

"I've seen you in jeans, bro," Mainoo says, sympathetically.

This season, Palmer has started in even better form than last: 12 goals and assists in his first nine games. He scored four in the first half against Brighton, but Palmer was annoyed: he thought he should have had six. Under Chelsea's head coach Enzo Maresca he has moved into a new number 10 role – the centrepiece of the league's most expensively-assembled team. He's working on adjusting his game, accordingly. "Different types of turns… mainly it's not even stuff on the ball, like off the ball, trying to find more space." In other words: how to get even better.

United, meanwhile, are engulfed in their worst start to a season since 1989. (As *GQ* went to press, the club sacked ten Hag, appointing Rúben Amorim as the new manager.) Mainoo has played well, and despite missing several weeks through injury, is focused on his goal of seeing the club back at football's summit. "It's definitely an ambition, and something I want most – to see United back on top. That is what pushes me," he says.

This a rare respite ahead of what is, due to changes in the international structure and European competitions, the busiest football season in modern history. "It's a crazy amount of games," Mainoo says. "People will start getting injured more," says Palmer. (Would he like to see a winter break? "Yeah. The more breaks the better!")

For now, it's nice for them to reflect on their year. Palmer has treated himself to a platinum and ice-blue Rolex Daytona, bought after his first England camp last year (it was not, he says, a reference to his nickname: "I just like it"), and a new car. "I bought a Lamborghini," he says. Inevitably, brands have approached him, offering campaigns and sponsorship.

He doesn't accept much – a nine-minute film of him fishing quietly in a Burberry duffel is the highlight – but one that stands out is an ad in which he goes back to his old youth clubs in Wythenshawe to donate boots to the youngsters there in person. It's a small gesture, but in a place where, according to the End Child Poverty Coalition, 39 per cent of kids are estimated to live in poverty, you can feel the impact. "Maybe because, like you're growing up, you don't really have much, do you know what I mean?" Palmer says.

> "The feeling you get when you win… you just want it again. You don't want to never get that feeling again." **Cole Palmer**

"I remember wanting boots off my dad and he wouldn't get me them, and that. You're living in council houses. So just to try and give back when you get to this position is nice."

What do you think those kids see, when they look at you?

"They look at it and think that they can do it, as well."

There's the clanking of sets being deconstructed; Mainoo has a train back to Manchester to catch for tomorrow's training. Before they leave: can they sum up each other's big year?

Palmer looks awkward. "Well, you're young…"

"I'm not that young, bro!"

"He knows I think he was the best player at the Euros," Palmer says, serious for once. "And obviously what he's doing for one of the biggest clubs in the world…"

Mainoo's turn. "It's been crazy in his first full season for the club – to be up there in goals and assists and goal involvements. It's massive."

And as for England? The international breaks are approaching. The team will soon have a new manager, the German Thomas Tuchel. Next summer's Nations League knockouts don't seem far away. Then the 2026 World Cup. They are – no matter what Kobbie says – still young.

"Definitely," Mainoo says. "It would be sick to play together for a long time."

OLIVER FRANKLIN-WALLIS *is features editor of* BRITISH GQ.

TAILORING, FAYE OAKENFULL. HAIR, TARIQ HOWES USING BABYLISS PRO AND BUMBLE AND BUMBLE. GROOMING, CATHY ENNIS USING NARS. SET DESIGN, JOSH STOVELL. PRODUCTION, FUSE PRODUCTION.

THE 2024 GQ FASHION AWARDS

It was a huge year for fashion romantics, exposed navels and viral tomatoes. Without further ado, the winners are...

Rick Owens' AW24 men's show, here and below, was an unforgettable spectacle.

SHOW OF THE YEAR: COURTESY OF SAINT LAURENT.

SHOW OF THE YEAR

RICK OWENS' HOLLYWOOD

SHOW OF THE YEAR: COURTESY OF RICK OWENS (2). LOOK OF THE YEAR: COURTESY OF BALENCIAGA.

→ **IN JANUARY, CITING** our "barbaric times," Rick Owens moved his runway show into his Paris townhouse. Guests sat on his furniture and drank coffee while models lurched through his living room in the autumn/winter '24 collection. Unlike most hardcore Rick Owens productions, this one was warm, cosy even – if you were lucky enough to nab one of the 100 or so invites. Owens felt guilty that he couldn't include the black-clad cult that treats his shows like national holidays. "I felt kind of like a dick about that," he said six months later. So for SS25, he said, "I thought, Well, we'll just put them all in the show!" In June, 200 fans of the brand, fashion students and a handful of runway regulars (plus a 13-person "gymnast bouquet") marched around the art deco Palais de Tokyo like representatives from the Rick Owens republic in a Cecil B DeMille–directed Olympics opening ceremony. Owens called the show Hollywood, a tribute to the place where he invented himself as a young Californian. It was an I-was-there moment in Paris, one that will go down in fashion history as an unforgettable testament to Owens' radical independent vision – and a poignant appeal for humanity in fashion. –SAMUEL HINE

LOOK OF THE YEAR

SAINT LAURENT

AW24 LOOK NO 34

SHIRT: Semi-sheer, double-layer buttoned silk shirt, with a high, pointed collar and French cuffs.

TIE: Wide, tapered tie in tonal grosgrain.

TROUSERS: High-waisted trousers in matching silk, featuring an unlined, relaxed leg with a single pleat.

JACKET: Double-breasted six-button jacket with georgette silk in a '90s cut, fully unstructured beneath wide shoulder pads.

SHOES: Vaccarello's first square-toed shoe design, in smooth leather with a stacked heel.

→ **SAINT LAURENT** creative director Anthony Vaccarello's tribute to the label's namesake was a sublime collection of flowing tailored looks, like this one, in surprising colour combinations cut from elegant silk. To make the suits drape and wrap around the body, Vaccarello crafted them with dressmaking – rather than tailoring – techniques, cleverly infusing the ultimate masculine garment with echoes of Yves Saint Laurent's iconic work.

"Men's wardrobes are ultimately very standardised," Vaccarello told *GQ*. "I wanted to play with these archetypes and the fantasy of the man going to work, while having fun with the proportion. The tie is a bit wider, the jacket a little longer, the shoes are a bit too square." –SH

COLLABORATION OF THE YEAR

TYLER, THE CREATOR X LOUIS VUITTON

FROM THE MOMENT he exploded onto the scene in the early 2010s, Tyler, the Creator has possessed one of the most prodigiously dialled aesthetics in popular culture – a pastel-splashed, prep-forward, unabashedly *fun* vision that he's used to power his own brands, Golf Wang and Golf le Fleur, alongside an ever-expanding roster of partnerships with the likes of Levi's, Converse and Globe-Trotter. This spring, though, Louis Vuitton men's creative director Pharrell Williams granted Tyler his grandest stage yet as a designer: a full-scale LV capsule collection, for which the Odd Future founder was able to harness the full force of the house's superlative craftsmanship to bring his singular personal style to life in its most opulent form. The resulting line – which included everything from quilted jackets and trucker hats to golf bags and chess sets – was a global smash hit, signalling that Vuitton might just have a successor ready if Skateboard P ever decides to roll on. –YANG-YI GOH

Looks from Tyler, the Creator's collab with Louis Vuitton.

STORE OF THE YEAR

STÒFFA

FOR A DECADE NOW, Stòffa has been one of the most tastefully locked-in brands in menswear, every season doling out a tight edit of drapey, dusty-toned garments that all flow together seamlessly. It's no surprise, then, that the New York label's new 2,000sq-ft SoHo flagship feels every bit as considered and zen-like as its clothing. The gallery-style front room houses a small selection of ready-to-wear hanging amid arresting vintage furnishings, and the rear space – reserved for made-to-measure appointments – is dominated by an astonishing skylight that casts a soothing glow on the handcrafted ash wood fixtures. It all makes for about as elevated and civilised a shopping experience as you're likely to encounter. –YG

At the new Stòffa space, shop off the rack or make an appointment for a made-to-measure experience.

COLLABORATION OF THE YEAR, FROM LEFT: GETTY; COURTESY OF LOUIS VUITTON/BFA (2); COURTESY OF LOUIS VUITTON. STORE OF THE YEAR: COURTESY OF STÒFFA (2). TREND OF THE YEAR, FROM LEFT: DAVE BENETT/GETTY IMAGES FOR NETFLIX; MERT ALAS/COURTESY OF CALVIN KLEIN; KATJA OGRIN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; GOTHAM/GC IMAGES; THEIMAGEDIRECT.COM. TRAINER OF THE YEAR: COURTESY OF BODE.

TREND OF THE YEAR

MALE SLUTTINESS

IT'S NOT JUST that the fellas showed a lot of skin this year – though, yes, that did happen, with thigh-baring short shorts and midsection-exposing crop tops running rampant all summer long. The sluttiness we're referring to, however, is more of a mindset than a literal state of undress. It's Jeremy Allen White carrying a gigantic bouquet of flowers home from the farmers' market in a rumpled shirt and baggy jeans. It's Jacob Elordi slipping a paperback into his cargo pocket. It's Donald Glover doing, well, pretty much anything. There's a knowing energy these guys put out, a vibe implicit in both their clothes and disposition that says, "I know you've noticed this subtle but sensual thing I'm doing, and I'm unbothered by your gaze." And being unbothered under scrutiny? That's the sluttiest thing a man can do. –YG

The boys of the sluttiness mindset (from left): Colman Domingo, Jeremy Allen White, Troye Sivan, Donald Glover and Shawn Mendes.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

BODE X NIKE ASTROGRABBER

WHEN BODE UNVEILED the Nike Astrograbber in April – the American luxury brand's first major collaboration – trainer fever was officially back. It had felt like years since a footwear collab made much noise at all; oversaturation led to a fallow stretch of big athletic brands recycling familiar vintage silhouettes. But then, Emily Adams Bode Aujla dove into the obscure corners of Swoosh history, discovering the '70s turf football model buried deep in the archives. The trainer, she declared, was "definitely not popular". But by the time Bode Aujla had updated the shape and laced each pair with modern, whimsical charms, the Astrograbber looked like a brand new shoe, becoming a celebrity street-style favourite at warp speed – and selling out even faster. –SH

WATCH OF THE YEAR

ALL THINGS PIAGET

IN FEBRUARY, PIAGET kicked off its 150th anniversary by rereleasing the lavish Polo, a watch with so much gold it could easily double as a handsome paperweight. The Polo 79 – to honour the year of the original's creation – launched a love affair between collectors and the brand's entire archive of opulent watches, whose dials are resplendent with gemstones like tiger's eye, lapis lazuli and opal. Piaget met the moment in 2024, as the craze for sexy dress watches escalated and collectors looked for unique ways to express their individual tastes through a timepiece. What makes the Polo so exciting is that when it was originally released in 1979, it became Piaget's first named watch, meaning nearly every piece that came before it was a one-off custom masterpiece twinkling with its own idiosyncrasies. In 2024, that's exactly what watch buyers were after. –CAM WOLF

MEME-MAKER OF THE YEAR

LOEWE

Zendaya, Loewe creative director Jonathan Anderson and Josh O'Connor in the viral shirt of the year.

"THIS TOMATO IS SO Loewe I can't explain it," an X user named @homocowboi posted on 3 June, above a photo of an unusually photogenic tomato. It racked up more than 97,000 likes and caught the eye of Loewe creative director Jonathan Anderson, who by 6 June had crafted the perfect response in the form of a clutch modelled after that very avant-garde fruit.

That was par for the course for Anderson, who arguably understands how to wield and manipulate internet culture to his advantage better than any designer alive. This year alone, he created the *Challengers* "I TOLD YA" shirt, perhaps the most viral movie merch since *Napoleon Dynamite*'s "Vote for Pedro" tee; transformed former 007 Daniel Craig into a shaggy-haired bohemian for a blockbuster Loewe campaign; and dressed Aubrey Plaza for the Emmys in a Post-it note-esque gown that became instant meme fodder. Keep posting through it, Jonathan. –YG

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

ALESSANDRO MICHELE FOR VALENTINO

AFTER LEAVING GUCCI two years ago, Alessandro Michele receded from the fashion world. To work on a film, perhaps, or simply spend his days tending to his extensive antiques collection. Thankfully for us, the designer who mainstreamed genderfluid, maximalist menswear made his triumphant return in September at the helm of Valentino, where he presented a passionate argument for the importance of frivolity with polka-dot dinner jackets, languid trousers and precise column coats tailored from sumptuous needlepoint. They were clothes that don't have all that much to do with how we live today, connected more to Valentino Garavani's archive and the bygone golden age of Italian style. But that was the genius of Michele's return. While he was out of the game, men's fashion began to emphasise understated practicality and comfort. Michele came back to remind us that beautiful, intriguingly embellished garments have their own special utility. As he put it following the show: "If you have a good relationship with clothes, you can really glorify life." –SH

Alessandro Michele's debut Valentino collection: both elegant and gloriously frivolous.

WATCH OF THE YEAR: COURTESY OF PIAGET. MEME MAKER OF THE YEAR, FROM LEFT: GOTHAM/GC IMAGES; DANIELE VENTURELLI/WIREIMAGE; LOREDANA SANGIULIANO/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES. COMEBACK OF THE YEAR, FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF VALENTINO (6); BREAKTHROUGH DESIGNER OF THE YEAR: PAUL YEM.

BREAKTHROUGH DESIGNER OF THE YEAR

WILLY CHAVARRIA

THIS YEAR, WILLY CHAVARRIA claimed his place as a critically important voice in global fashion. The Willy wave has been building for some time: the Chicano designer's finely crafted workwear and exaggerated prom suits – tailored with a badass, never-kitschy flair – earned him the top menswear prize at the 2023 Council of Fashion Designers of America Awards. But it wasn't until this autumn that he left a truly indelible impression.

Chavarria, 57, is hardly a fresh face – he spent most of his career working in the corporate-fashion establishment. Since going solo in 2015, the Fresno, California–born, New York–bred designer has faced the challenges that confront any young brand. Chavarria has responded with a unique ranginess. As business grew, he unveiled a collection of couture opera coats and, earlier this year, a provocative line of pre-distressed underwear that drew on his experience as a designer at Joe Boxer and Calvin Klein. Tasteful and influential celebrities have noticed: Kendrick Lamar wore a Willy Chavarria tracksuit in his "Not Like Us" music video.

In September, Chavarria built on the buzz, bringing New York Fashion Week to an abandoned bank on Wall Street for his treatise on América, as he dubbed his SS25 collection. In an acrimonious election year, with anti-immigrant rhetoric flooding the airwaves, Chavarria told a story steeped in pride.

Set under an enormous star-spangled banner, the show was an ode to the working class, delivered through United Farm Workers sweatshirts, cropped mechanics shirts and dungarees tailored in Chavarria's signature oversized proportions. Chavarria commands among the most inclusive runways in the business, and his crew of tough, tattoo-covered models embodied a crystal-clear idea of beauty and power woefully absent in the wider fashion world. "It's really about the fact that all of us belong, all of us have purpose, and all of us have the ability to make change in this country," Chavarria said backstage.

Chavarria's codes are solidifying, but he still has tricks up his sleeves. The show appeared to be over when the music darkened, then out came a surprise Adidas collaboration, an extensive capsule inspired by NBA legend and activist Kareem Abdul-Jabbar that will introduce Willy Chavarria to his biggest audience yet. The designer made clear that he sees no limits on his empowering vision for menswear: "I want to make sure that I'm creating collections for all people," he said. –SH

SHOE OF THE YEAR

DAINTY LITTLE SHOES

Bode

Magliano

Dior Men's

The Row

→ **FOR A LONG** while, the biggest thing in men's footwear was, well, bigness. Balenciaga has been locked in an arm's race with itself for years now, unleashing ever-more gargantuan trainers season after season. The Big Red Boots by the fashion pranksters at MSCHF, meanwhile, ran rampant over the internet last year. But a funny thing happened in 2024: our shoes shrank. And they didn't merely return to regular sizes. Instead, guys suddenly gravitated to svelter, more delicate and, yes, more demure choices – ballet flats, Mary Janes and low-slung slippers, all with little-to-no outsoles to speak of. That change in dimension brought a touch of welcome contrast to the wider silhouettes that continued to dominate menswear – and gave our feet a break from lugging around all those concrete-block work boots and clown-sized runners. –YG

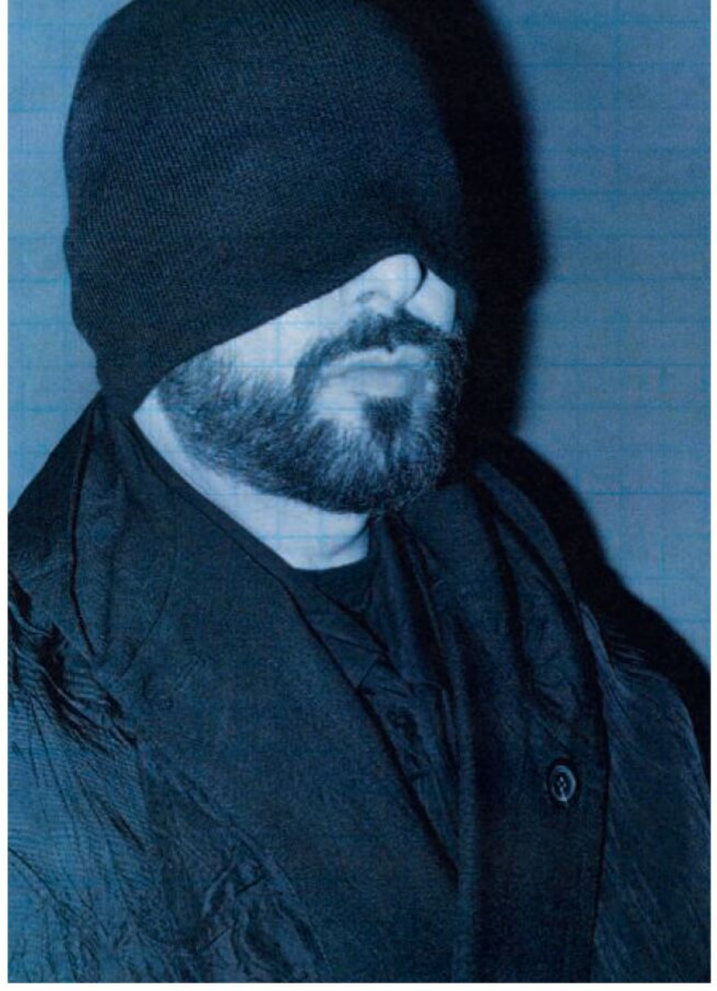
FINALE OF THE YEAR

DRIES VAN NOTEN

Noten takes his final bow on the runway in June.

→ **"IT WAS THE** last chance for me to take risks, so I grabbed it," said Dries Van Noten of his swan song in June, which marked the 150th and final collection in the Belgian menswear legend's hall-of-fame career. Designers don't always know how or when to hang up their shears, but Van Noten went out on his own terms: with the world's most graceful retirement party. Rather than stage a retrospective of his greatest hits, he drew over 800 admirers to the outskirts of Paris for a poignant production full of fresh ideas for how to dress with intrigue and elegance (followed, of course, by a night of disco dancing). It was a reminder that Van Noten left menswear much better than he found it, and a clear message to his successor. As he put it: "They have to dare; they have to move forward." –SH

SHOE OF THE YEAR, FROM TOP: COURTESY OF BODE; COURTESY OF MAGLIANO; COURTESY OF DIOR MEN'S; COURTESY OF THE ROW. FINALE OF THE YEAR: GIOVANNI GIANNONI/WWD VIA GETTY IMAGES. RENEGADE OF THE YEAR, RUNWAY: COURTESY OF BALENCIAGA. MOST STYLISH PERSON OF THE YEAR, FROM LEFT: THEIMAGEDIRECT.COM; ROWBEN LANTION/BAFTA VIA GETTY IMAGES; VICTOR BOYKO/GETTY IMAGES FOR GUCCI; JOJO KORSH/BFA.COM.



RENEGADE OF THE YEAR

DEMNA FOR BALENCIAGA

→ **"FASHION NEEDS** to get messed up, it needs to get fucked up… it needs not to be based on fear," said Demna in September. For the past decade, the Balenciaga creative director has gleefully ignored the rise and fall of trends to define his own avant-garde universe of style. And as fashion took refuge in the cashmere folds of quiet luxury, Demna found a new gear. Thought streetwear was dead? Demna dropped the most extreme Franken-sneaker of his career, then engineered an entire haute couture collection out of T-shirts and hoodies and bombers and jeans. And to close out the year, he threw his own playbook out of the window, subverting the oversized, protective silhouette he popularised with a downright steamy show featuring clever lingerie bodysuits and scintillating low-rise jeans, precisely cut right on the fearless edge. –SH

Balenciaga is for the fashion diehards.

MOST STYLISH PERSON OF THE YEAR

PAUL MESCAL

→ **EVER SINCE** Paul Mescal and his "Connell chain" graced our screens in 2020's *Normal People*, the Irishman has been heralded for both his acting chops *and* his refreshingly regular off-duty wardrobe – cropped tees, just-snug-enough denim, fraying Carhartt jackets and, most crucially, quad-baring short shorts. ("I'm a fan of the short inseam," Mescal told *GQ* at a Gucci show in June. "I'm a big advocate for men wearing shorter shorts.") And after proving he was exceedingly good at wearing normal clothes, he let his clever red-carpet suits elevate him to an aspirational menswear god. But Mescal's most memorable style manoeuvre this year transpired during a late-night Sweetgreen run in Manhattan, when he donned a teensy pair of Gaelic football shorts, Kelly Green Adidas trainers and a generously cropped hoodie. The actor's outfit left the internet simultaneously coveting his micro athleticwear, his gym routine and his go-to salad order. (One dogged TikToker claimed it was the pesto bowl.)

–EILEEN CARTTER

Paul Mescal proves that true style is about having the confidence to bare your midriff on a salad run.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JASON NOCITO**

GQ MOTY 2024

PHARRELL WILLIAMS

Despite the Pain

Riding along
from Paris to Hollywood to New York
with the Louis Vuitton
men's creative director,
whose prolific and often prophetic
contributions to fashion, film and music
have once again thrust him to the centre
of the pop culture Venn diagram.

By **Will Welch**

Photographs by **Eli Russell Linnetz**

Styled by **Matthew Henson** and **Eli Russell Linnetz**

you're wondering how Pharrell Williams' gig at Louis Vuitton is going 20 months into his appointment, consider this: the luxury house that represents the crown jewel of Bernard Arnault's £230 billion LVMH empire has more or less tripled the footprint of its men's creative director's office at 2 rue du Pont Neuf in Paris.

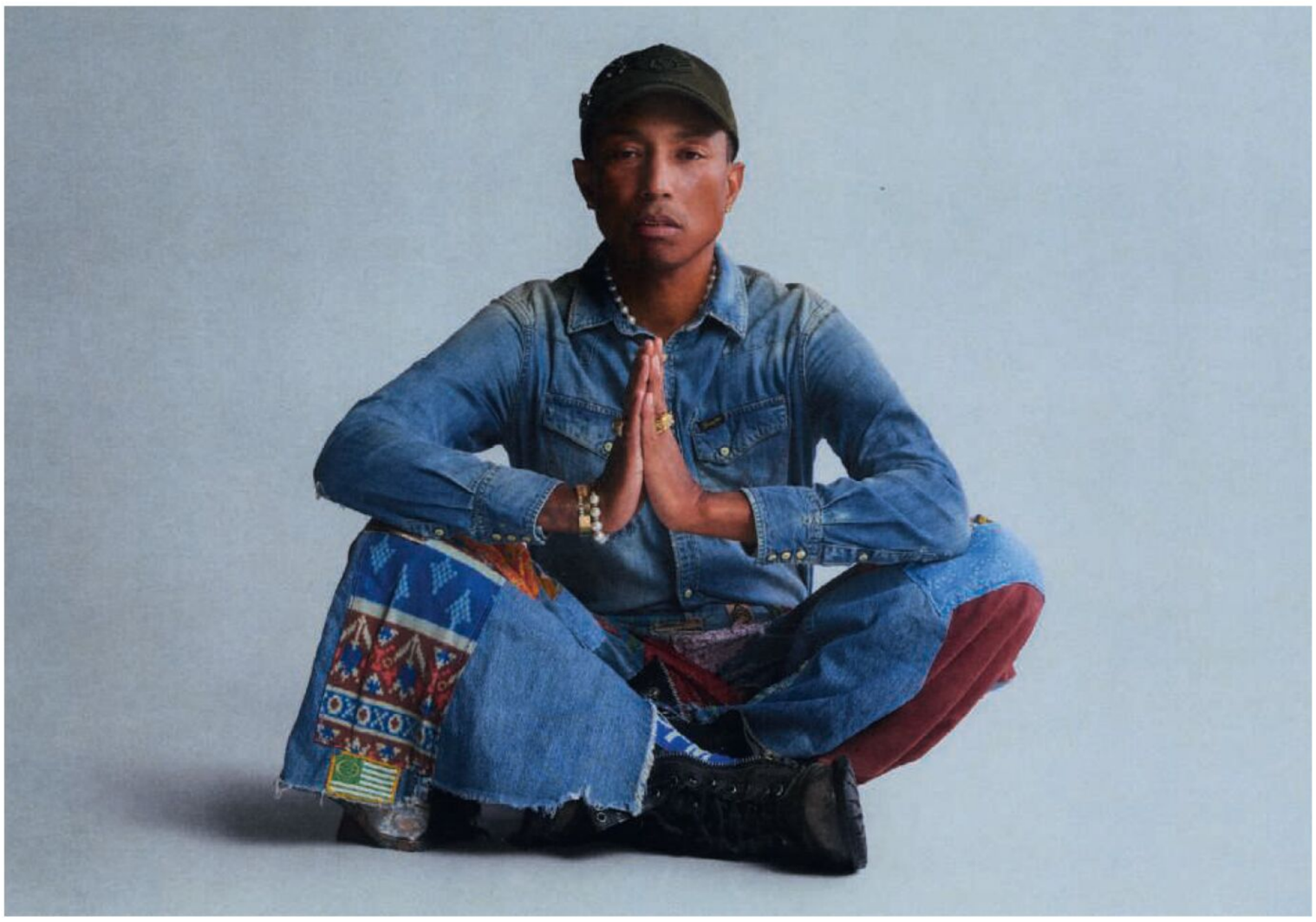
Pharrell still works partially in the modest space previously occupied by his predecessor, Virgil Abloh, but the company has blown through several nearby walls, creating an airy and design-filled executive power suite. Our first interview took place on a new couch in a recently created corner room, with expansive views across the Seine to the Left Bank and beyond. "We don't do a lot of work here," Pharrell told me. "We do a lot of dreaming and manifesting." Nearby was his gleaming new recording studio.

Speaking of music studios, Pharrell's *GQ* shoot took place two days after our Paris interview – but 5,600 miles away – in Hollywood, during a 7am to 2pm sunrise shift at a recording complex. By the time our crew wrapped, Pharrell had engineers working in three different rooms.

The following week, when we reconnected yet again, in New York City – where Pharrell was promoting his new animated Lego biopic, *Piece by Piece*, as well as announcing his role as co-chair for next year's Met Gala alongside Lewis Hamilton and Anna Wintour – I asked him about his multifaceted setup back in LA. "I had three different rooms for three different artists," he said. "That's the way I like to cook. I like to go from room to room, because one room reminds me that the other room isn't as hot as I thought it was before I left. Having different rooms going makes you zoom out. Because you zoom in to make it, but then you zoom out to judge whether it's fire."

When I expressed concern that he had flown from Paris to LA specifically to record music, only to have those recording sessions swamped by a *GQ* shoot, Louis Vuitton business, Lego movie business, and presumably the machinations of plenty of other projects I wasn't privy to, the 51-year-old simply blinked at me and responded: "That's the way that I like it."

What follows is an edited conversation with the planet's most prolific multitasker, and *GQ*'s Designer of the Year, about the ins and outs of what will one day inevitably be known as "the Pharrell Era" at Louis Vuitton – and "the LV Era" for Pharrell.



PHARRELL: Tell me when you're rolling.

GQ: Rolling.
We should start with joy. Joy is not only an experience and an emotion, but it's an art form. And it's the colour I paint with.

Why are we starting there?
Well, [before we started rolling] you talked about our 2019 interview, and I don't ever read my interviews, but I'm pretty sure that I talked about my gratitude, and gratitude has brought me far in life. And the sense of joy that I feel is the next step up.

We talked a lot about humility last time too.
That's forever the exercise.

I like this idea that a life can be spent evolving through a focus on different emotions. So this is an era of exploration and discovery of joy for you?
Joy is a result. The exploration is just like humility, empathy, gratitude, chivalry. After living so much of my life one way –

Which was how?
Ambitious, but arrogant. Pompous at times.

Not a complete unbridled asshole, but cocky.
Yeah. Whereas what I've learned now is that when you err on the side of humility, empathy, gratitude, chivalry, you still – your talent is your talent. Your gift is your gift. So when you fuse all those things in it, that produces joy. My appointment here, it's so much bigger than apparel, footwear, bags, accessories, trunks –

Stuff.
– Campaigns, shows, windows. Man, I think about the shoes and bags that we are about to drop – bro, you will remember this conversation. It's so crazy. But it took the brand tapping me on my shoulder to say, "Hey, you're supposed to be in this position and this is what you're supposed to do." The appointment is not just here [at LV], it's an appointment to my life. In every situation that I encounter, my job is to produce joy.

I think people have a hard time accepting somebody as successful as you constantly articulating humility and gratitude. Always bowing.
I'm sure.

←←
OPENING PAGES
jacket and shirt
ERL

vest, belt, sunglasses, and bag (throughout)
Louis Vuitton Men's

trousers
Found

necklace (top, throughout) and bracelet (bottom, throughout)
Tiffany & Co

necklaces (bottom), bracelet (top), earrings and grills (throughout), his own

bag accessories (throughout)
ERL

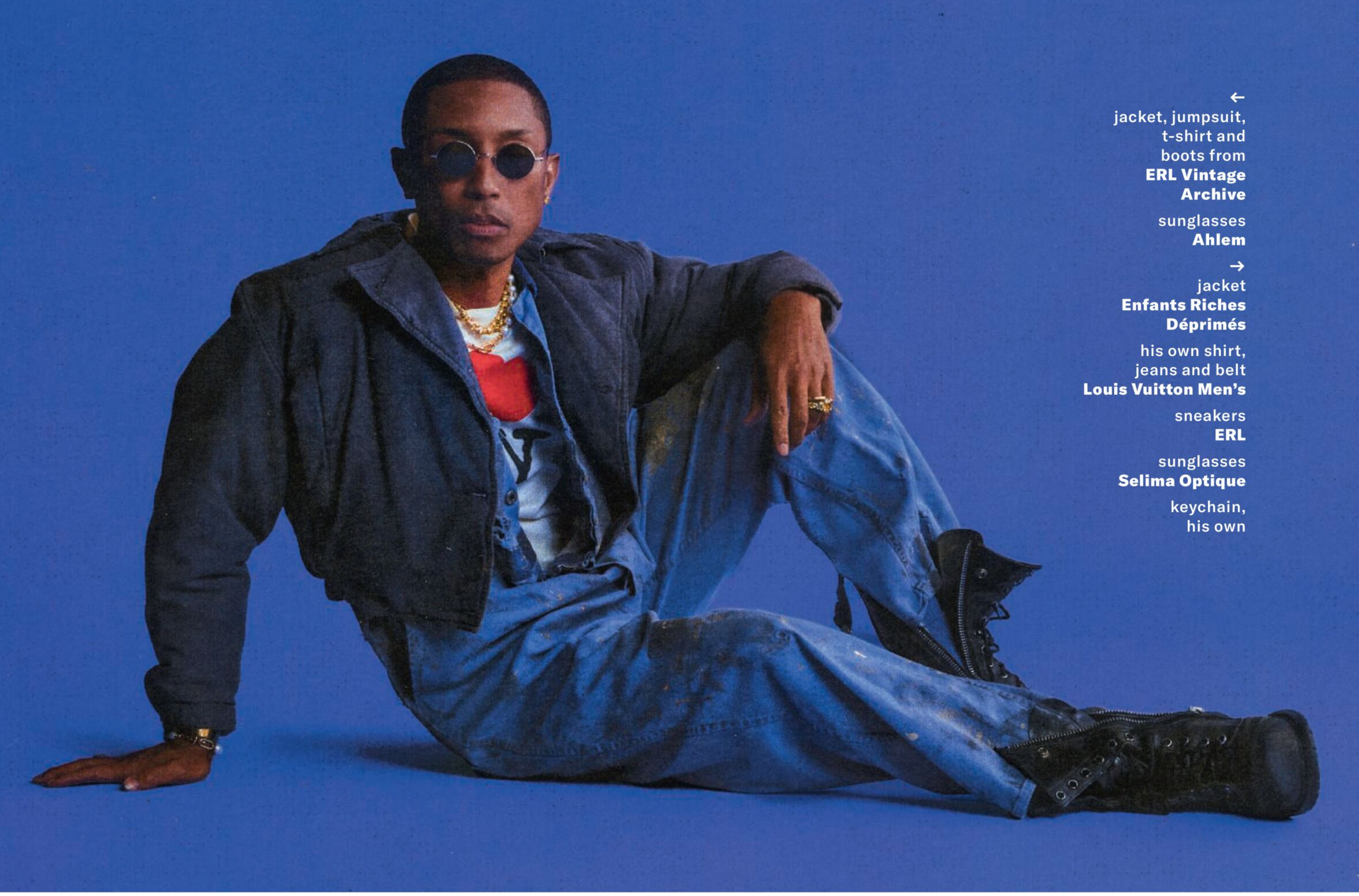
THESE PAGES
vintage shirt
Wrangler

vintage jeans
Levi's

boots from
ERL Vintage Archive

hat and his own belt,
Louis Vuitton Men's

socks and rings (throughout), his own



←
jacket, jumpsuit, t-shirt and boots from **ERL Vintage Archive**

sunglasses **Ahlem**

→
jacket **Enfants Riches Déprimés**

his own shirt, jeans and belt **Louis Vuitton Men's**

sneakers **ERL**

sunglasses **Selima Optique**

keychain, his own

Because people are like –
Yeah, get the fuck out of here.

"Easy for him to do, with his millions..."
But you know what? I could be the exact opposite.

I guess part of what you're saying is you once were, right? You tried the exact opposite.
It was the worst. It was the *worst.* It's *embarrassing.* When you really realise how this shit works? *You* didn't sell a million songs. You made a song and a million people liked it because 100 people promoted it and the conditions were perfect for you. There's so many components to your success. You are one little part of it.

You might find it embarrassing, but a lot of people liked your flashy era. You were very good at it, very innovative. Now in your Vuitton era, you have dialled the flashiness back up without it being a contradiction to the humility and gratitude. How can you have it both ways?
Silence. Believe it or not, that's the difference.

I know you just said "silence," so forgive me, but this is an interview. I need you to say more.
Silence is an exercise. Allowing your work to speak for you is an exercise. Being OK with the fact that most people are going to miss it. Being extra OK with the fact that the people who don't miss it, who decide they want to act like it was their idea – they're going to get very loud about it, and they're going to get the credit for it. Until some of the real sleuths out there will be like, "Nah, here go the receipts." And you wait on that. But you stay in silence. [Human Made founder] Nigo-san, he taught me that. He don't say nothing. As Pusha [T] says: if you know, you know.

Two years ago you founded an online auction platform called Joopiter. To launch it, you got all of your iconic custom jewellery – stuff from, let's call it your hubris era – out of storage and sold it. Was that stuff weighing on you?
I didn't realise. You never realise how much all the stuff you have weighs on you, but it does. You don't know it until you get rid of it. The muscles in my back, now they work without straining. When you let that go, man, you feel so free. It doesn't mean it doesn't exist in the world. It's still there. And whatever happens to them happens to them.

Right. In this case, Drake buys a bunch of it.
Sure.

How and when did you find out he was the buyer, and were you like, "Hmm, is this for –"
No, because I think beyond all of the on-goings, at the heart of all of it, he's a fan of music. He's a fan of the history of what it is, and I happen to be a part of that, and those artifacts are a part of it.

So when you found out he bought them, you were like, "Cool"?
Yeah.

And then when he was rapping about melting the jewellery down and saying, "Come get his legacy out my house" and all that stuff, how did that strike you?
It didn't.

That didn't strike you?
No.

It's interesting that these things are weighing on you, you get rid of them, somebody else takes them on, and what they mean to him – I guess that's for him to decide?
Or not. I guess some things are not for me to understand. When you let things go, a huge part of it is actually letting go. Not just of the physical item, but letting go of your connection to what it's supposed to mean, or the memory. You're literally letting them go. That was the purpose. It's like when people sell something and they go, "I just want to make sure you take care of it because this is my baby." And I'm like, "No, no, no." This is not my baby. That's why I'm letting it go.

▪ ▪ ▪

OK, let's talk LV. Best day on the job so far?
Every day.

Damn it. I knew you were going to say that.
I know, man. But listen, when you –

But there has to have been a particular day... Because the next question is going to be "Most challenging day so far?" I'm trying to give people some texture of what it's like to be you in the LV era.
But what's the challenge, man? I'm from the mud, so what's the challenge?

Well, I didn't say the worst, most awful, terrible, horridly unacceptable day on the job.
Listen, can you see this? [*Walks over to an office window that looks over the Seine.*] Look.

OK, I see the Seine.
OK...

Oh. There's an encampment between us and the river.
Yeah, you see people who have a very different experience than we do. Who knows why they're there? Who knows what the situation is? I'm from the mud. We were in public housing. You can't ever say that public housing is like being homeless and living in the street. But you can say that the way that people live and what their resources are at the time is relative. I could be anywhere. The ideas that I have for [LV] trunks could just be ideas while I'm at my day job. You know what I'm saying?

It's definitely true that there are a lot of young people out there who are designing the next Louis Vuitton collection in their heads.
Who may or may not ever get that opportunity.

Yeah. Definitely may *not*.
And that's my point. So, how is every day not amazing? I know everything isn't awesome for everybody, but it can be if you were to retool and level set your appreciation. Level set your wherewithal. It can be amazing.

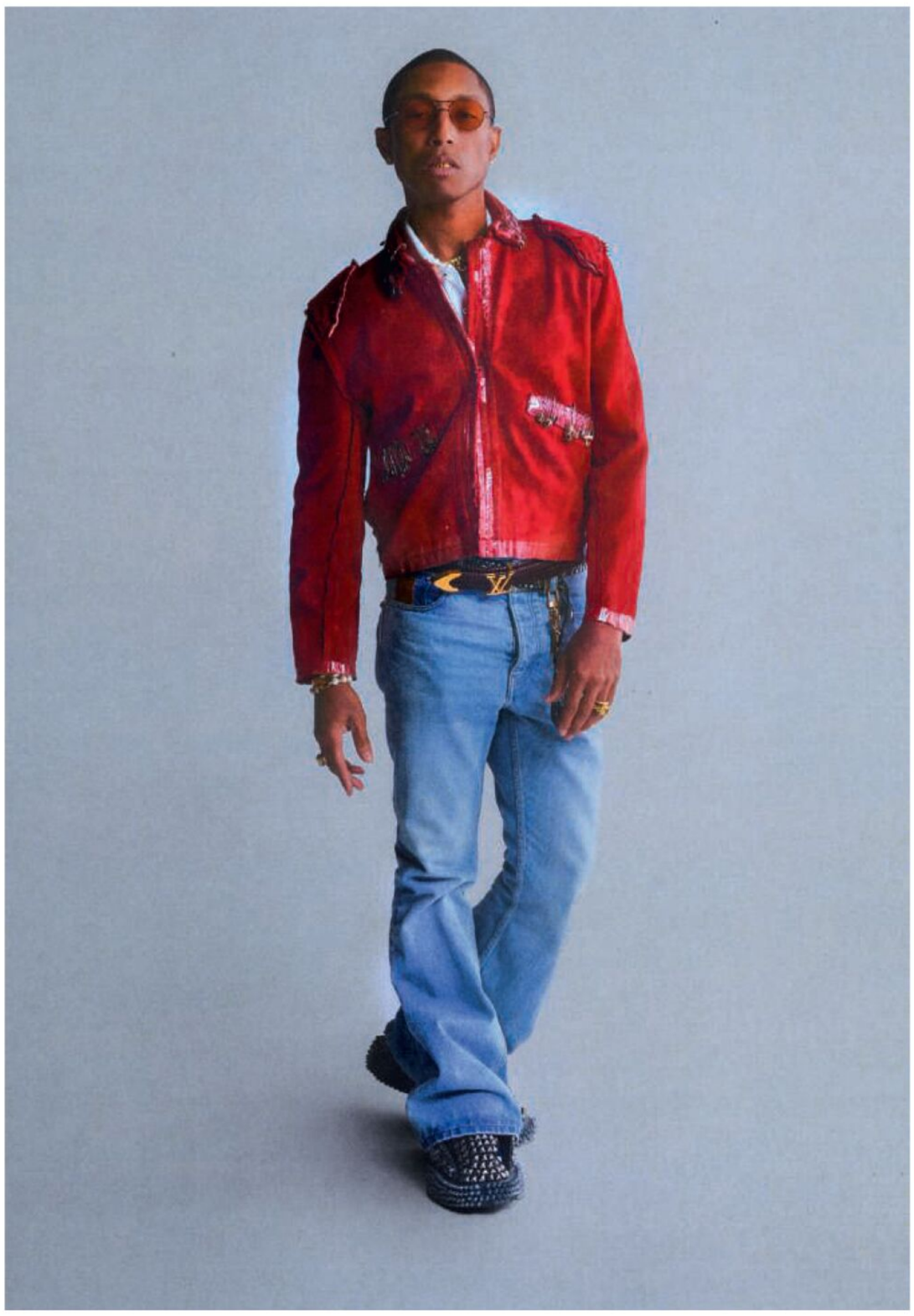
So, what was an example of a moment in the last 20 months where you lost that connection to your gratitude and got outside of yourself? And, I don't know, felt frustrated or stymied?
It's a big system, and sometimes you want it to move as quick as you ideate or iterate. And sometimes there's drag. But I'm blessed to be in a system where they listen, and we articulately explain why we think something is a drag and how it could be much more efficient. This is a system that listens. So there's moments where you got to exercise patience. And we do.

What's it like having a job at a corporation after so many years of total artistic independence?
Well, it's a house that happens to be machined by a corporation. It's not a job.

Why not?
Because I don't have a boss. It's a house. And I've been asked to come in and be the creative director. I mean, I love [Louis Vuitton CEO] Pietro [Beccari] and he appointed me, but he is not my boss.

And Bernard Arnault is not your boss either?
No. I'm in a house. It literally operates like a house. Obviously, it's his house. And they pay me very well. But no one's like, "You better do this" and "You need to do that". It's like an artist in residence. So it's very different. I wouldn't have taken it if somebody thought they were my boss. I'm good. I am blessed.

So tell me a little bit about the nature of your conversations with Pietro Beccari. What happens when the two of you meet?
He's one of the best executives in the game because of a few things: he's good with strategy. He is an empowering supporter. And he has a spine. And people with a spine can stand next to you or stand behind you because they have vertebrae. And there's a lot of intersections where we agree. One is about efficiency. So when I tell him, Hey, we need *da-da-da-da* so I can be creative – so I can iterate and ideate and do what I got to do – he makes it happen.



And how does your working relationship with Bernard Arnault function?
Whenever we are together or we meet or we have a meal, we share our philosophies on the state of the business. We also talk about culture. He's very dialled in. You don't get to be a guy of his stature by not being dialled in to culture. He's dialled in.

Right, you can't build LVMH by staring at spreadsheets.
By *only* staring at spreadsheets, because he does that too. His eyes are 3D. One is looking at spreadsheets and the other is looking at culture. And when he blends them together, he gets this three-dimensional understanding of how the world is working and how it's going to work. And we do that too: we have precognitive conversations.

What do you mean by that?
We talk about the future. Where we see it going. And we have several aspects of his businesses that are very close to his heart, and he has asked me to lean in to them. And so you'll see some really interesting Moët things pop up. [*Tugs on gold necklace.*] I did this with Tiffany.

OK, so you're here at LV, this is your residency, but there's another house across the street you can wander over to as well?
Yeah. It's: what do you want to do? Can you lean in to this? Can you lean in to that? And we do. And then there's philanthropic things that we've been working on. For them, it's philanthropy. For me, I call it tithing. It's just giving back to the universe.

▪ ▪ ▪

In my role I get to spend a lot of time in Paris, but I've never moved over here for 20 months. You moved your family here. What are you learning?
French, a little bit at a time. And being here, looking across the pond, I just see how we rile each other up. I see how we're so tribalist. You know how condensation will show iridescence in your fingerprints,

depending on how the light hits it? You can see the fingerprints of foreign agents and foreign countries pitting us against each other. You can see the fingerprints from here.

Because of the distance?
Because of the distance. And that's something that is hard to watch, but you don't want to be in it because you would be one of them, choosing a side. And then there's the people in the middle of it who have a salacious hunger to feed their bias. And so they do whatever it takes to get you to try to choose a side. If you don't, you're the enemy. And when you choose a side, everybody [on that side is] with you. And then the other group of people who differ in opinion hate you. And it's like, Yo, what do y'all think those stars on the flag are about? You think every state is alike? You crazy?

Yeah. It's not just a blue square.
Thank God Hawaii is not like Iowa, and Iowa is not like Illinois. New Mexico is nothing like Atlanta, Georgia. Thank God! That's what makes us beautiful. And how did we become the United States of America? Put aside for a second, the original sin – the first commodity in the country, which was Black people. Let's put that to the side. How do we become that whole idea that was marketed to us, that this was the land of the free and the home of the brave, and that all these different nations from around the world, mostly Europe, would come over there and set up shop and create this new world, right? What happened to that?

Yeah. It's supposed to be the *United* States.
And we're the furthest from it right now. All of that is hard to watch, man. And for me, listen, I don't think you're supposed to agree with everything.
But you need to appreciate the differences because you are different from somebody else, too. And that's what we have completely lost sight of. This is how I know the glaze is over our eyes back home: when I hear these talks of anti-immigration and "They're coming into our country and they're bringing diseases, they're raping, they're killing, they're bringing drugs, they're taking our jobs" – you could take the words from some of these speeches and just show Native Americans and put these speeches with them. They were there first. They would have the right to be the ones to say that. And so when you think about these people that are wanting you to take a side on certain things, it's like, Man, I am sorry, but I am not with any kind of division.
To me, we are all God's children. And if the Lord loves everybody –

Who are we to hate?
I'm not with the divisiveness.
You know there's the word *sword.* You move that *s* to the back, and it's *words.*
I choose words. I wish there could be no loss of life, and people could discuss their differences. But I also know that the world doesn't work that way. And again, that's the reason why I say to certain questions, like, Man, don't ask me, because I'm a celebrity, what I think about this or what I think about that. I'm of no authority. Don't ask me.

You took a similar stance in an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* that was published soon after Taylor Swift endorsed Kamala Harris. And the headlines became that you dissed Taylor.
Because that's what they do. They pit you against each other. I love Taylor. She knows that.

To be clear, in the interview you did not say her name.
No. Zero. In fact, I bought a *1989* Taylor T-shirt online last year, and I was walking around here with it tucked into my jeans. I love her. I love people, bro. That was some right-wing troll shit. But I heard something the other day that made the most sense in the world: right-wing, left-wing, all the same bird.

So if you reject the binary, where do you stand?
Well, I'm so glad you asked, because, for me, just because you offer me the options doesn't mean that I need to exist in that.

"I reject your menu."
Yeah, I reject your menu. And I deserve the right. I actually do stand for something, of course, but I don't have to share it with you. Who are you that I need to report to you what I feel? What if I don't like either of your choices? What if I love people? What if I'm not a war person, I'm not a fighter? The cliché thing would be to say I'm a lover – and shit, I guess that it is what we did here [at Louis Vuitton], right?

Well, there's good clichés and bad clichés.
Right. But my thing is like, I don't have to share my discourse with you. I stand for my ability to remain silent. I'm all about action. I've donated, I've volunteered, but I don't need to show you and I don't have to tell you. It's anonymous because I don't care what you think. I care what my god thinks. I worship the god of Abraham, which is the same god of the three considered monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. I'm also a universalist, so my Buddhist siblings? All good. For me, there's room under the sun for everyone. My Hindu siblings? Yo, same thing. And any other theology

jumpsuit, t-shirt and boots from **ERL Vintage Archive**

sunglasses **Ahlem**

that recognises the all that is, all that ever was and all that ever will be. You call it whatever you want. I don't got to get in the comments. You do that. You stay there, and you live your life there, wake up one day addicted to eating couch filler. It's fine with me. By the way, if I wasn't like that, then I couldn't preach "Live and let live". You know what I'm saying? You can't have it both ways. You either really down with "Live and let live" or you not. And if you are down with "Live and let live", then you really got to live and let live.

Even when it's uncomfortable.
Absolutely. In my mind – not in anybody else's opinion, but in my mind – I'm like a merited civil servant. Meaning it doesn't matter who's in the White House, we got things we got to get done for our country. I might not like your politics, but that's what being American is supposed to be about. Right? You got to be able to work with "your side" and "the other side". If there's things that I need to get done for Virginia that's going to benefit Virginians, I'm willing to have a conversation with whoever the powers that be is going to be.

▪ ▪ ▪

Let's talk about your year at LV. What was the first spark that ultimately led you to create the Cowboy collection?
It was two things: one, my dad loves Westerns. And I never really understood it, because he says shit sometimes, and I'm like, "Dad, you can't say that." He's from a different era. He was shot in his back and called the N-word, so that stuck with him. But certain times he says things where I'm like, "Dad, come on." You know what I mean? He's a boomer, so boomers...

Boomers boom.
Yeah, sometimes boomers boom. But he loves Westerns, and I'm like, "Dad, you do know that's not how it was? They're missing Black, Asian and other folks that were doing a lot of the work, and the way that they're treating the natives is terrible. How do you like this?" He likes a lot of the actors who, in real life, how they regarded Black people was terrible. And he knows that. But he still just likes the art form. And also, I just love Chanel's Paris-Dallas. [In 2013, Karl Lagerfeld staged a Chanel runway show in Dallas.] So the collection was kind of like an homage to two people that I looked up to. That's why I called it the Paris-Virginia collection.

Your other big Louis Vuitton show this year was the UNESCO show, which was just a few weeks before the Olympics arrived in Paris. First you gave us cowboys, then you gave us the fashion version of "We Are the World".
Wow. Thank you.

To be honest, I had a really complex experience sitting at that show. As the models started coming out, I was like, the clothes are very dark and so is the skin tone of the models. Now the clothes are getting lighter and so are the skin tones. And there was some voice inside of me that said, "You can't do that. You can't line up the models from darkest skin to lightest skin." And I sat there while the show was happening, debating it. Can you do that? If you can't do that, why can't you do that? And I couldn't find a reason why you can't do that. It made me aware that, as a white man from the American South, I am hypersensitive about anything racial.
That was the point. The point was for you to have a human connection to it. Using race to make a connection, without making it about race. It was about connecting to a colour and seeing that you belong. At first, when you see the tone on tone –

jacket and trousers
Vivienne Westwood
shirt and hat
Louis Vuitton Men's
vest, belt buckle and gloves from
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You think race and your whole body tenses up.
And then, when you look, it's not racial at all. It's just making you feel like you belong, just like everybody else in the colour wheel of existence. That was the point. I wanted everybody to feel welcome – because it's the prelude to the Olympics. And what is the Olympics?

"We Are the World", baby.
It's just humanity.

▪ ▪ ▪

Has the role at Vuitton changed the role that music plays in your life?
It has, but not in the way that you would assume.

Is it fair to assume there's less time for music?
More time.

How is that possible?
Because the Vuitton appointment has centralised me in a place where I can do more music. You've been to the music studio within the design studio [in Paris].

Yes.
And I got two other rooms. Before I was just taking music everywhere I went. Now music is at the heart of everything that I'm doing.

We were shooting Future and Metro Boomin last night in Miami.
Can you tell Future that I'm obsessed with *Mixtape Pluto*? Man, "Ski", "Plutoski", fucking "Aye Say Gang".

I like "Brazzier". But it struck me that Future is 40 years old, and he has had three No1 albums in six months. Of street music. That's not supposed to happen in rap. You said to me that Jimmy Iovine once told you: "It's impossible to have a hit past 40." So I feel that this narrative around ageing in hip-hop music is evolving.
Pusha was the first one to really talk about people aging gracefully in hip-hop. He's been talking about it for years. Jay-Z did it really well.

Meanwhile, André 3000 has been talking for years about how it's impossible to age well in hip-hop.
Yeah. He has been, and he's such a GOAT. People got all this judgement and they don't understand. People should just give him his time. He's going to be back. That feeling finds you – you can't run from it. He's not running, he's just saying he's not going to force it. What you love about him was when he was compelled. It'll be back. And when it does, he's going to come in hot.

When you're making music, do you ever catch yourself reaching for something you're hearing from the youth? Do you ever find yourself reaching for a trend?
No, I don't reach for no trend and I ain't reaching for nothing that I used to do. The trend was doing documentaries. I said no.

What do you mean?
Well, I mean [with *Piece by Piece,* the Lego animated biopic that came out in October], six, seven years ago, my very persistent agent kept asking [about doing a documentary]. I was like, "No, I don't give a fuck who's doing it, man. We already got *them* – they're doing it." I don't want to do what everybody else is doing, bro. You know me. If everybody is stuck in traffic, I want to take the plane.

It's been cool to see you at so many fashion shows. Why have you been going to other designers' shows and what have you learned?
Well, I'm always going to go to a Comme [des Garçons] show. I'm a Comme child. Rei Kawakubo is something else. I went to a Sacai show recently, too. I love Chitose [Abe]. And I'm a huge fan of Jonathan Anderson.

What catches you about his work?
I think Jonathan Anderson is – I won't even call him underrated, because I think people do know.

Yeah, they caught on.
Jonathan believes in getting to the point. He makes his statement very simple. To me, on the other end of the spectrum is Rei, who is very simple about her ideas, but she's complex in her design. And then, obviously Kim [Jones] is a friend too. Kim was the first one to open up his doors to me when I left Chanel.

Open up his doors how? Saying "Let's do something together"?
Yeah: let's do whatever. He was giving me carte blanche, and I'll never forget that. It never materialised because I ended up going to Vuitton.

You likewise opened up the doors of LV to Tyler, the Creator for a collaboration this year. What was the best moment of working together?
Me calling him to tell him. He's 30-something now and rarely gets the opportunity to be a kid again. He's lived so much life in the last 10 years – the growing pains of becoming a world-renowned artist. So that was my favourite moment: "Wait, who, me? Seriously? Whoa." He crushed it. I really just stood to the side and let him rock.

So recently I was having a – let's call it a "fashion conversation", and this person was like, "I think Pharrell will leave Vuitton soon. I'm sure he feels like he's done it now. He's checked the box, and soon he'll be ready to move on."
Wow. Did they just hit a joint when they said that?

Unclear.
They might have just taken a sip of something. You know what I mean? Because that's a high thought.

Any truth to it? You've done it, and you're ready to move on?
I don't think I've done it yet. This feels like *doing it*, this doesn't feel like *done it*. We're unlocking so many things. Reimagining the system – I'm all about system, strategy, and structure. And I think when you get all three of those humming, then you get to a place of simplicity. I love to work in silence. We don't really give you the progress reports, we just hit you with the blams.

WILL WELCH *is* GQ*'s global editorial director.*

←
jacket, trousers
and sunglasses
Louis Vuitton
Men's

t-shirt and belt
ERL

→
jacket,
turtleneck
and trousers
Maison
Margiela

boots and
pin from
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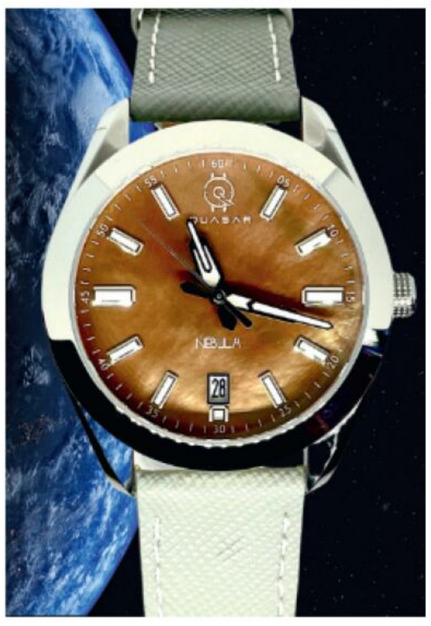


Introducing Quasar Watches, the forward-thinking, fast-growing horology brand. Using precision Japanese movements, exotic dials and high-end materials, their limited edition watches are hand-assembled with durability, individuality and flair at the forefront of design. Visit quasarwatches.com and @quasar_watches on IG.

MARLÉO

Marléo's Anaqa timepiece is a versatile sports watch, available in two colourways; Mediterranean Blue - inspired by the captivating hues of the Mediterranean Sea's coastal regions and Seashell White - reflecting the elegant design and colours of a mother-of-pearl shell. Follow @marleowatchwear on IG and visit marleo.com.au

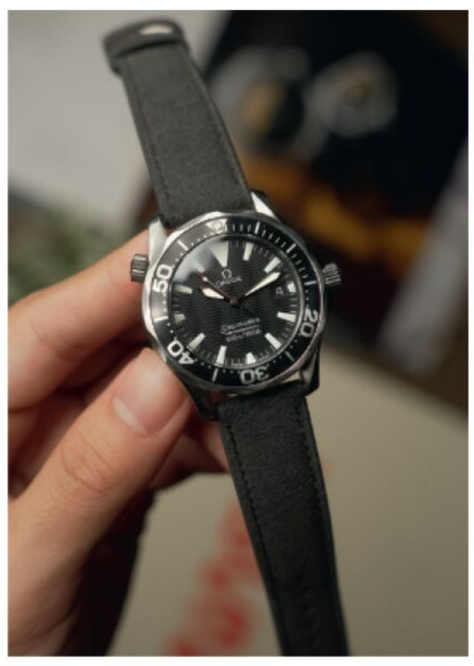
MINASE

Minase has crafted the 25-piece Limited Edition Horizon GEN DLC, a timepiece that captures the beauty of darkness from a Japanese perspective. Inspired by the horizon line over the sea, its sleek design combines simple lines with expert craftsmanship, resulting in an elegant and unique watch that fits perfectly on the wrist. Discover more at minasewatches.com and @minasewatch on IG.

WIS WATCH STRAPS

WIS Straps combines innovation, premium materials, and unmatched comfort to elevate your timepiece. Offering quick-release straps with built-in case pins, WIS allows effortless strap changes with no tools required. With a range of styles including leather, rubber, and NATO, WIS straps are the perfect blend of durability, style, and function for every watch enthusiast. Visit wisstraps.com and @wisstraps on all social medias.

LUFF WATCH STRAP



This Christmas, give yourself or a loved one the gift of timeless style. Luff Watch Strap, elegantly packaged in their signature tin box, is the perfect choice for watch enthusiasts. Experience a unique blend of heritage and craftsmanship. Explore their collection at luffwatchstrap.com and follow them on IG @luffwatchstrap

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ORIGINAL CREATOR

Original Creator combines British heritage style with modern-day versatility. Known for their high-quality fabrics and iconic graphics, OC delivers timeless looks with functional details like water-repellent finishes, perfect for staying sharp, whether in the city or on the go. Visit theoriginalcreator.com and @iseetheoc on IG.

ICÔNE

ICÔNE: a unique brand of tailored clothing that highlights the intricate workings of exclusive artisans and embroiderers. Beyond mere style, the brand represents spiritual significance and a profound link to spiritual energy. Each piece features sacred imagery and a handwritten protective prayer, making their clothing true works of art and talismans that carry blessings. For more information and to view their full range, visit icone.world and follow @icone.grmnt on IG.

INDINO13

INDINO13 craft unique, bohemian-inspired styles that are both timeless and versatile—perfect for everything from a tailored suit to a relaxed, nonchalant look. They believe jewellery is more than an accessory; it's a celebration of individuality and life's special moments. That's why they work with skilled artisans dedicated to craftsmanship, ensuring each piece is beautifully made to last. Visit indino13.com and follow on IG @indino.13

NUAN CASHMERE

Established in 2005, NUAN Cashmere believes in slow fashion and legacy styles of 100% finest-grade cashmere. NUAN provides essential, timeless pieces for a capsule wardrobe. Explore NUAN's collections including bespoke, women and living, visit nuancashmere.com and @nuancashmere on IG.

FULLORD

The new soul Ghost ring reworks the iconic Ghost shape with a polished white gold surface and round cut black diamonds on the four corners for a masculine contemporary feel. This piece honours the exceptional craftsmanship of the Fullord atelier. Designed in Switzerland. Made in Italy. Visit fullord.com and follow @fullordgeneva on IG.

WIRTH HATS

Wirth Hats was created to honour their friend Jakob Wirth, who hoped to one day start his own hat company. To date, Wirth Hats has sponsored thousands of hours of therapy for those who need it most. Read the full Wirth story at wirthhats.com online and @wirthhats on IG.

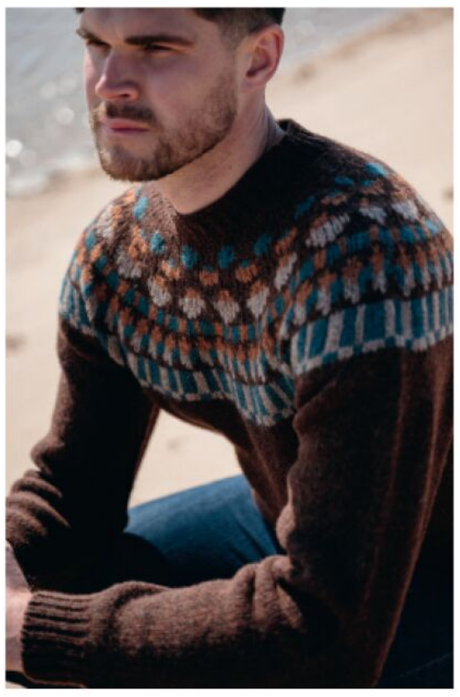
FRENVYRN

Based in Austin, Texas, FRENVYRN is an emerging conscious jewellery brand. Their pieces are unisex and versatile, sustainably made using responsibly sourced materials, combining classic and contemporary styles. For pet lovers from a pet lover. Use GQ1 for 15% off at frenvyrn.com (expires 25/02/24) and follow on IG @frenvyrn

UNLUCKY JEWELLERY

Jewellery doesn't need to be boring. UK-based, stainless steel jewellery with a sharp edge of rock 'n' roll. Made to be worn every day. Carbon-neutral with a tree planted for every order. This brand is for those who are and always have been unlucky. Visit unluckyjewellery.com or @unluckyjewellery on IG.

THE CROFT HOUSE



Inspired by Scottish heritage and beautiful landscapes, The Croft House is a range of slow fashion 100% wool knitwear, made in Scotland using high quality British spun yarns. Add one of their jumpers, hats, scarves or gloves to your Winter wardrobe at thecrofthouse.com and follow @the_croft_house on IG.

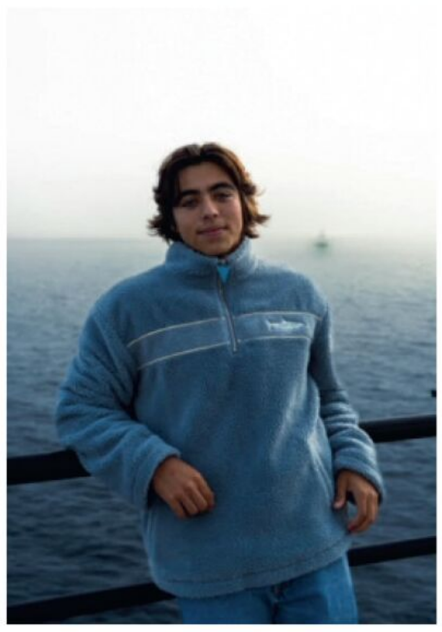
GANG IS LUV

Gang is Luv is a lifestyle brand based out of the US. They have two missions: to advocate for the building of families, friendships, and communities and to make timeless clothing that your kids will steal out of your closet in 30 years. Visit gangisluv.com or @gangisluv on IG.

PUSHPULL

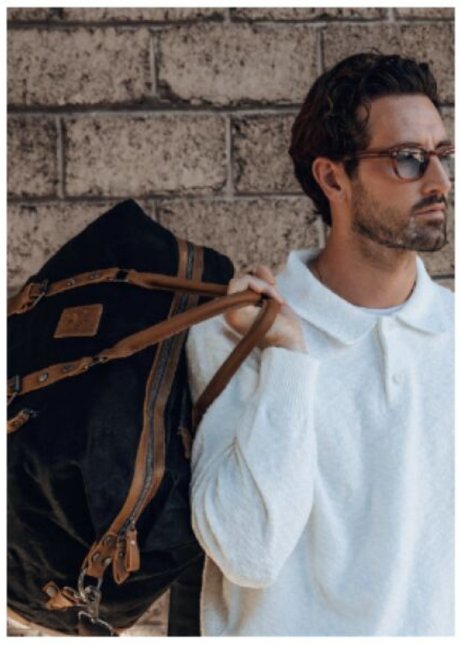
PushPull, a Melbourne streetwear brand, embraces streetwear's power to explore, connect, and create. Evolving from a garage screen-printing press, the brand aims to develop into its most authentic form. Their mission is to encourage self-exploration, foster community connections, and ignite creativity in everyone they reach. Follow on IG: @pushpull.shop & shop at pushpullshop.com

SURF TRIP SUPPLY



Surf Trip Supply is the Christian-based surf company founded by Larry Flores at just 14 years old. Over the course of 4 years, the brand has hit monumental revenue growth, was featured in Netflix's Outer Banks, and is expanding internationally. This is the brand that feels like a friend group. Visit surftripsupply.com and @surftripshop on IG.

KOVERED



Kovered Bags improve with age; creases enhance their character, and scratches add personality. Just as some fashions never go out of style, classic style never goes out of fashion. Your backpack, messenger bag or holdall will make an ageless statement without uttering a word. Visit kovered.co.uk and follow them on IG: @kovereduk

EVOKE AMORE

Rooted in understated elegance, EVOKE AMORE captures the essence of refinement and heritage with every piece. Drawing from timeless design philosophy and true craftsmanship, their collections speak to those who value quality and individuality. Explore that which transcends trends at evokeamore.com and follow on IG @evokeamore Timeless design, evolving with you.

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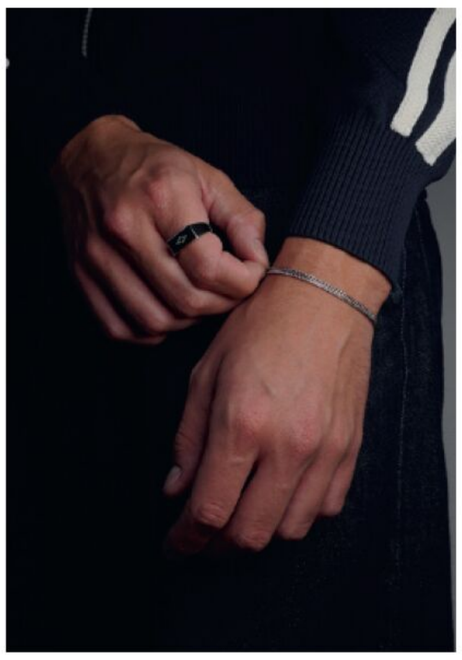
ACARDI



Swedish jewellery brand Acardi showcases the essence of Scandinavian design through its minimalistic pieces. Crafted from premium stainless steel and sterling silver, each piece is built to withstand the test of time, offering durability and backed by a lifetime warranty. Buy yours on acardi.co and follow @acardiofficial on IG.

CORREAL CO

Hand composed with care in Brooklyn, Correal Co have created a jewellery line using solid recycled 925 sterling silver, offering unique designs that are digitally fabricated yet harmonious with nature. Design along the grain of time. Browse correal.co and follow on IG @correal.co

ELISIUM

Step into the world of ELISIUM, where art, luxury, and rebellion converge in every piece. The Infamous Zip Up Hoodie is a bold statement of individuality, creating an aura that sets you apart from the crowd and empowers you to embrace your unique style. Join the community of fashion forward individuals and elevate your wardrobe at enterelisium.com and @elisiumgarments on IG.

EMPIRE

Empire Collection, the brand redefining modern luxury, brings a powerful blend of elegance and urban style to the fashion forefront. Known for their sophistication and innovative edge, Empire Collection has captivated audiences globally, showcasing standout ready-to-wear and sustainable swimwear collections at the world's top fashion events, including New York Fashion Week, Beverly Hills Fashion Week, Texas Fashion Week and Atlanta Swim Week. The latest swimwear line—crafted from 100% sustainable materials—embodies the brand's commitment to eco-luxury, earning the spotlight globally alongside celebrity endorsements. Discover a new realm of style with Empire Collection. Visit empirecollection.studio and follow @empire_collection on IG.

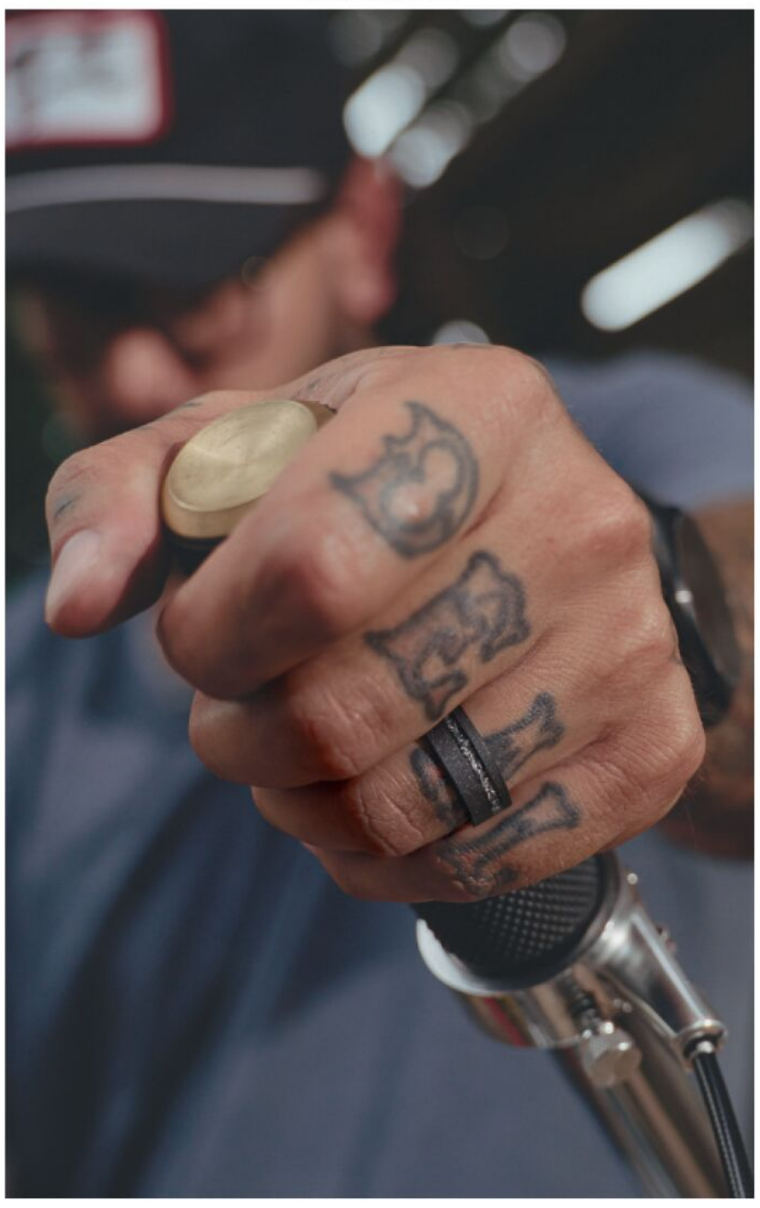
IEMBE

Entrepreneur and marketing visionary Travis Terry founded IEMBE in his college dorm room in 2019. Since then, the brand has skyrocketed with its luxurious bags and accessories. Terry's innovative approach to fashion has made him one to watch, as he shapes the future of luxury fashion. Visit iembe.com and follow @iembeofficial on IG.

JOSEPH TATE

Joseph Oraifoh is a Nigerian-born illustrator and designer renowned for his captivating illustrations celebrating men's fashion. His work adorns the spaces of distinguished individuals worldwide, from London to Seoul. See his illustrated t-shirts and art prints on josephtateofficial.com and follow @josephtateofficial on IG.

THORUM



Thorum handcrafts unique wedding bands out of everything from meteorite to whiskey Barrel. Founded in 2012 by co-owners Caleb and Steph Martin, they've been making distinctive rings for over a decade. Visit thorum.com and follow @thorum on IG to discover more.

FHATT

Based in Istanbul and led by Fatma Nur Dogan, FHATT blends timeless menswear silhouettes with innovative fabrics, continuously reinventing classic styles with a fresh and modern edge. Each original piece tells a story you can feel. Explore their collection at fhatt.co and follow @fhattco on IG.

HALLOWS

Designer Kuba Rygal brings tasteful elegance to minimal, punk-inspired fashion. Each handmade piece combines luxury with a gothic edge, featuring sleek silhouettes and monochrome palettes. Refined yet distinctive. Visit hallows.ca and follow @hallows_brand on IG.

ROYAL MILE SILVER

The Edinburgh-based jewellery brand offering a unique range of affordable Tungsten rings. Durable, hardwearing and stylish, these rings are perfect for the modern man. Get 15% off online with GQ15 at royalmilesilver.co.uk and in person. Find them at the iconic Edinburgh Christmas Market [expires 30.01.25].

EGOCODE

As EGOCODE evolves, expect an exploration of self-expression and sustainability. Each collection invites you to embark on a journey of discovery, where fashion becomes a conduit for personal transformation and conscious living. Sign up for their latest drops on egocode.eu and follow @egocode.eu on IG.

PLAYERS ONLY

Players Only is a luxury brand that delivers high-quality fabrics, cut and sewn in Europe to bring the perfect fit & style. Popular for their unique vintage washes with a perfect balance of minimalistic designs and graphics. A key theme with each drop is to have an item you can style for multiple occasions. Visit playersonlyclothing.co.uk and @playersonly__ on IG.

4UNDER

A passion for music meets tattoo culture with 4Under: an independent, British lifestyle brand creating individualistic clothing for the discerning. They work with talented artists in creating apparel you can be proud of. Visit 4under.uk and follow on IG @4underclothing

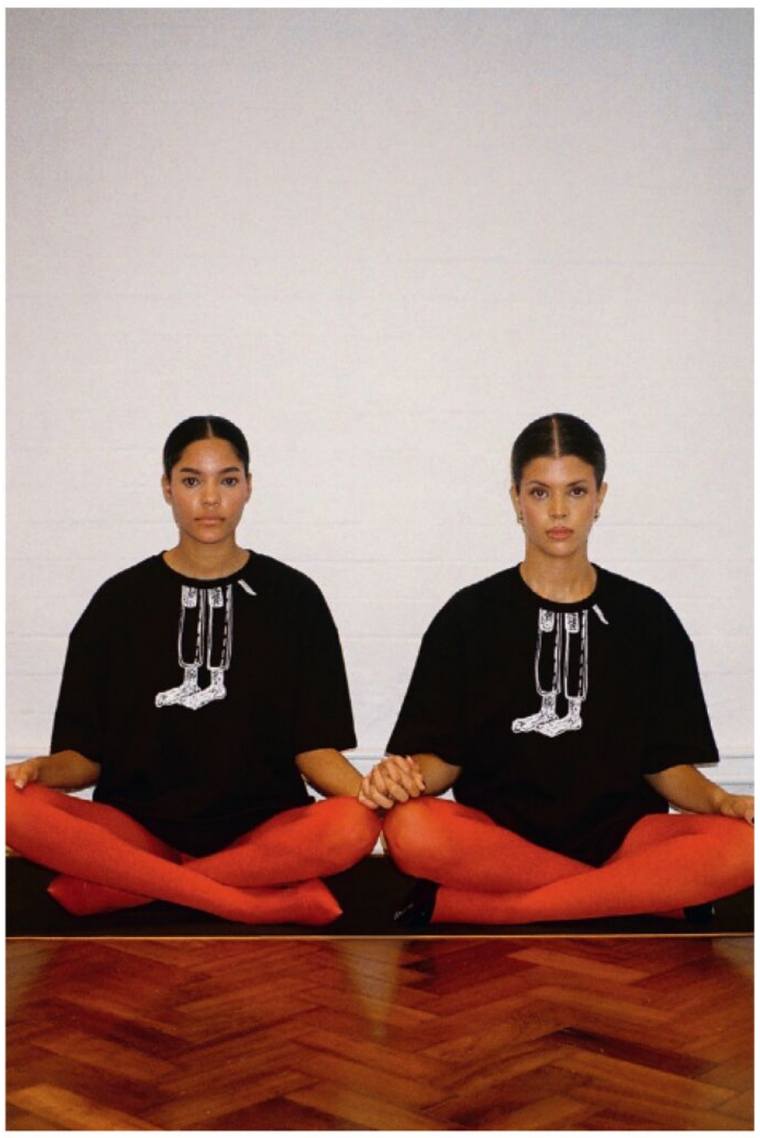
NORDFORM

Scandinavian leather manufacturer and designer Nordform delivers the best belts you'll ever try, made to last a lifetime, guaranteed. Comfortable in every situation - all day everyday. They offer a wide selection of interchangeable straps to perfectly complement your outfit. Say goodbye to worn-out belt holes. Available at nordformstore.com IG: nordformdk

BEORMA LEATHER COMPANY

Beorma Leather Company is one of the last remaining artisan leather companies in the UK. Beorma's commitment to excellence is ingrained in the premium material they use — full-grain vegetable-tanned leather. Each piece is made with time-honoured techniques that make British-made goods so legendary. Their ambition is to make leather goods that can be bought as a gift this Christmas, that will become a companion for life. Every stitch, a story. Visit beorma.co.uk and follow @beormaleather on IG.

GESCHWISTER



Between accessories and apparel, Geschwister is bringing culture, creativity and comfort. Inspired by London's myriad of hybrid subcultures, which is constantly shifting and evolving, they offer premium apparel to elevate your wardrobe. Geschwister is about celebrating these multiplicities because beauty has no fixed address. See more at geschwister.com and follow on IG @geschwisterofficial

FAVELO

Inspired by 'favelas' (slums), Favelo embrace a unique narrative that resonates with the resilience found in challenging beginnings and the pursuit of excellence. Alpha signifies inherent strength, while Omega represents the ultimate vision, a commitment to reaching the pinnacle of style. Favelo aren't just a clothing brand, they start from the alpha of raw determination within the 'favelas' and evolve into the omega of unparalleled sophistication. Visit faveloworldwide.com and follow on IG @faveloworldwide

VESCARTES

London-based VESCARTES is a streetwear brand that turns diverse cultures into wearable art. Their debut 'Edo' collection, inspired by feudal Japan, blends modern streetwear with traditional Japanese art. Featuring intricate embroidery, some designs use up to 500,000 stitches. Follow @vescartes.clo on IG and visit vescartes.com for upcoming releases.

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FERRO ALDO

Based in Los Angeles, Ferro Aldo by Conal delivers a modern twist on timeless men's footwear. From sleek casuals to refined formals, each pair combines sophistication with everyday style. Discover more at conalfootwear.com and follow them on IG @conalfootwear for the latest updates.

HOPE DESIGN

Hope Design is a lifestyle brand and community whose mission is to uplift those around us to be their best selves. Through quality clothing and positive brand messaging, they wish to unify and elevate our surroundings. Hope Design celebrate everyone's differences and encourage people to come together for a greater purpose. Browse their website on hopedesign.work and follow on IG @_hopedesign

HARVEY JEWELS

Harvey Jewels is a bespoke luxury jewellery brand based in Sydney, Australia. Their innovative take on form is showcased in their second collection. Founded by young designer Zara Toohey, Harvey Jewels is an emerging brand to keep an eye on. Visit harveyjewels.com.au and follow on IG @harvey.jewels for more.

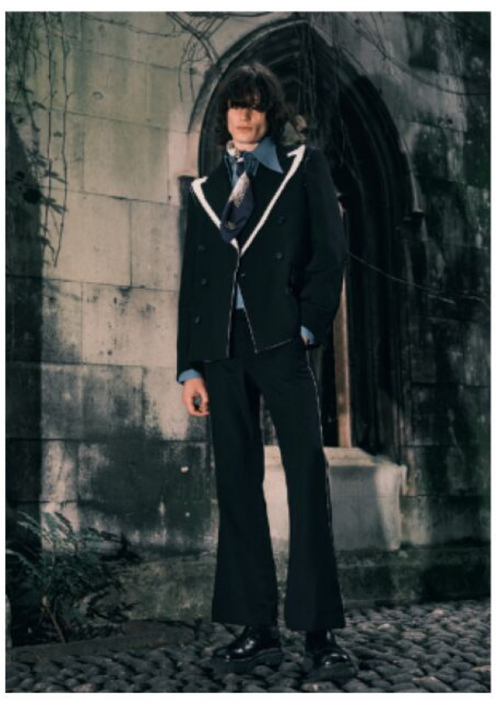
CHERUBIN'S PALACE

Founded in 2022, Cherubin's Palace is an inclusive and responsible brand. They work to honour the past, fight against fast fashion and create an inspirational product range, from simple tees to unstructured skirts. Visit cherubinspalace.com and follow @cherubinspalace on IG.

MEANFORME

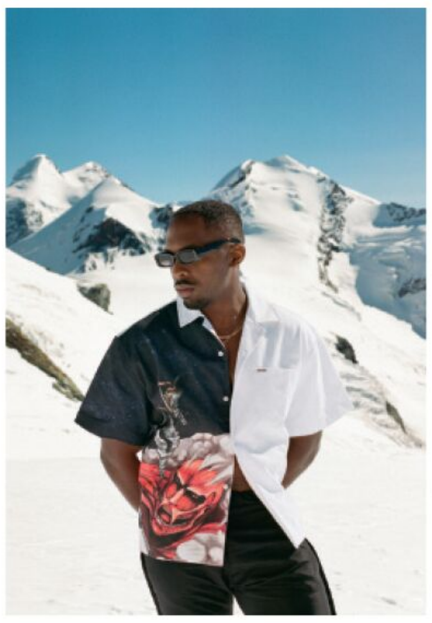
Manchester's Meanforme continues to grow its hand-crafted footwear range into Winter 24 with the launch of a host of new options in time for Christmas. Each pair takes almost one hour of hand sole stitching, and all are made using some of Europe's most exquisite leathers and suedes. Shop the range at meanforme.com and follow @meanformeshoe on IG.

CÈDRE



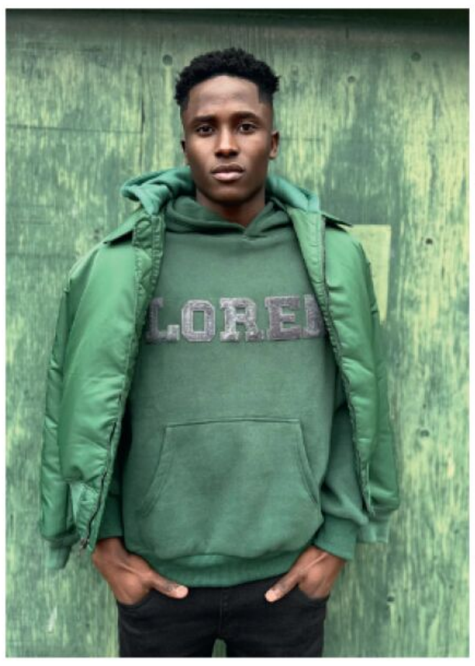
CÈDRE is a London based brand with a touch of Tokyo: infusing classic clothing with an edgy, Japanese style. They seamlessly integrate luxurious pieces into daily life. All items made in Japan. Discover more at cedre.com.co or on IG @cedre.jp

CAEDES



Described as an exploration of art and clothing in harmony, CAEDES is a pioneer within the manga-inspired streetwear space. Their limited-time releases include casual wear, outerwear and jewellery. Pictured is the now sold out 'Colossal' shirt. Visit caedeslondon.com and follow on IG @caedeslondon to keep up with their new collections.

J.LOREN



Distinguished menswear brand specialising in luxury streetwear J.Loren has carved a niche in the fashion industry. Blending sophisticated styles with streetwear aesthetics, they appeal to a diverse clientele that appreciates both comfort and high-end fashion. Visit j-loren.com and follow on IG @jloren.co

ESPIAYE APPAREL

Founded in 2018, Espiaye Apparel is redefining luxury for the modern man with stylish, affordable clothing and accessories. Their commitment to quality is unmatched, offering a lifetime warranty on all sunglasses and jewellery - a true testament to their craftsmanship. Browse espiaye.com and follow @espiaye.apparel on IG.

FEAR OR FAITH

In a short amount of time, Fear or Faith has evolved from a start-up into a growing brand with a powerful message. Focused on overcoming adversity, the brand resonates with those who seek strength in difficult times. Fear or Faith aspires to leave a lasting impact by inspiring self-belief and resilience in its followers. fearorfaithco.com and @fearorfaithco on IG.

GOLDENWOOD APPAREL

Goldenwood Apparel, a lifestyle streetwear brand from Montreal, blends premium-quality clothing with unapologetically bold designs that break the boundaries of what Canadian streetwear can do. Inspirations range from cartoons and anime to neurodiversity awareness. Their mission is to instill a strong foundation of self-acceptance, creativity, and authenticity. Visit goldenwoodapparel.com and follow @goldenwoodapparelstore on IG.

ESSENCE BY SOUL

Essence By Soul redefines luxury fashion with a powerful blend of high-end textiles and authentic African-American storytelling. Merging culture-inspired narratives with modern design, they create artful collections that bridge diverse communities and elevate representation. Visit soulbyame.com and follow @essencebysoul on IG.

FACE.HIDE EYEWEAR

Last month Face.hide Eyewear introduced the Secret Shop password hunt. If you found the clues in the November issue you are already one step closer. In this image, you'll find the second clue. Combine it with next issue's final hint to complete the password and get access to their secret collection at facehide.it Follow on IG @facehide.eyewear

VAALLAN

VAALLAN is a small designer from Swansea offering repurposed and handmade men's and unisex streetwear. Most of their collections are designed using hand-woven Khmer Sueng and Cambodian Silk, one of the most valuable fabrics. All of their designs are limited edition; they only make up to 45 pieces of each design. For more information visit vaallan.com and follow on IG: @vaallan.design

Hey Good Cooking

1. Forest Floor was established to offer premium organic wellness supplements that support a healthy lifestyle and sustainable living. Aimed at conscious shoppers who are struggling with focus, energy, brain fog and switching off the noise, Forest Floor offers a solution which is good for the customer and for the planet. Visit **forestfloor.co.uk** and follow on IG: **@forestflooruk**

2. Ananda Elixirs introduces Supershroom Soda – a revolutionary fusion of flavour and function. Infused with mushrooms, this refreshing drink aims to elevate your energy, focus, and calm without the sugar or crash. Portable and versatile, it's the perfect companion for those who demand more from their daily sip. Elevate your wellness at **anandaelixirs.com** and **@anandaelixirs** on IG.

3. Delicious in cocktails or sipped neat, **Tico Tequila** is redefining what tequila should taste like. Crafted with tradition and purity, they offer a premium, additive-free experience at an accessible price point. It embodies smoothness and sophistication, delivering a clean, approachable, agave-forward taste. Visit **ticotequila.com** and **@tico.tequila** on IG.

4. Australian Rare's Karri honey is a true gem in the world of premium honeys, sourced from the majestic Karri trees of Western Australia's southwest. This exceptional monofloral honey has earned international acclaim. For honey connoisseurs and health-conscious consumers alike, Karri honey represents the pinnacle of natural, premium honey products. Visit **australianrare.com** and follow on IG: **@australianrare**

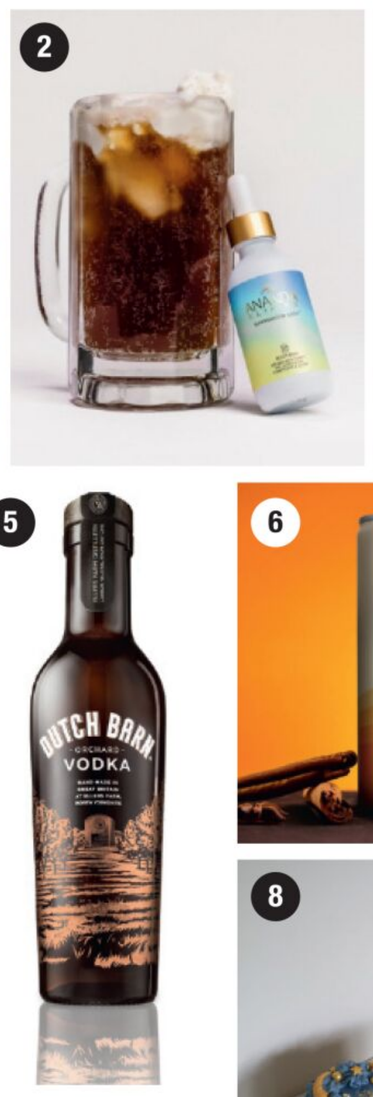
5. Dutch Barn Vodka is visionary vodka distilled from 100% British apples in North Yorkshire, and co-owned by Ricky Gervais. Deliciously crisp, incredibly smooth, distilled over 70 times, and tasted every 20 minutes, the award-winning hand-crafted liquid is like no other. Visit **dutchbarn.com** and **@dutchbarnvodka** on IG.

6. Sunnyside Drinks Co are renowned for crafting the best alcoholic ginger beer money can buy. They've recently pioneered the UK's first mulled alcoholic ginger beer pack, ideal for cosy winter nights with friends. Their super refreshing alcoholic ginger beer, paired with the special spice sachets, creates a heartwarming and delicious mulled drink. Shop and explore **sunnysidedrinks.co.uk** or **@sunnysidedrinksco** on IG.

7. NAUGHTEA has taken the humble iced tea and given it the twist you never knew it needed. The UK-based alcoholic iced tea brand provides a refreshing experience due to it being non-carbonated. So, you can keep on responsibly sipping can after can. NAUGHTEA comes in two flavours, Peach and Lemon. Visit **naughtea-drinks.com** and follow **@naughteadrinks** on IG.

8. Indulge in the finest handcrafted cakes in London. At **Misa's Patisserie**, they take pride in creating exquisite celebration cakes that are as beautiful as they are delicious. They use only the finest ingredients to ensure that every cake is a work of art. Perfect for any event, big or small. Follow **@misa.patisserie** on IG and visit **misa-patisserie.com** to see more.

9. SUPERKEEN is the award-winning gut-friendly cereal for all. Born out of the founder's health struggles, this cereal is driven by purpose. SUPERKEEN is 100% Natural, gluten-free,vegan and AIP (Auto-immune) friendly. Free of the top 14 allergens, super delicious and nutritious. Made from innovative, real, and safe ingredients that everybody can enjoy. Launching in January 2025! If you're keen to know more visit **superkeenfoods.com** and **@superkeenfoods** on IG.



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Fresh Faced

1. WOHA Parfums is a project that seeks the fusion between architecture and the world of aromas and fragrances, giving life to a collection called 'Liquid Architecture'. This fusion seeks to find a means of expression, evoke spaces and, of course, capture situations through the different stages of evolution of each fragrance. Visit: **wohaparfums.es** and **@woha.parfums** on IG.

2. Ultimate Grooming products set the standard in the male grooming and barbering industry, combining premium quality with refreshing scents that leave you feeling revitalised and confident. Crafted for superior performance, each product delivers exceptional results, ensuring a polished look and a rejuvenating experience that elevates everyday grooming to an art form. Visit: **ultimategrooming.co.uk** and **@ultimategroomingbarbershop** on IG.

3. BACK TO ME SKINCARE: Discover Moonlight Elixir, a soothing serum designed to help calm and nourish the skin with moisture. Its lightweight formula, enriched with natural ingredients like hemp seed oil and rosehip seed oil, can help reduce the appearance of imperfections, making it ideal for post-shave care or under-beard maintenance. Experience the luxurious benefits of this serum and enhance your skin's natural radiance. Visit **btmskincare.com** and follow on IG: **@btmskincare**

4. Discover **HOTEL, MIKE.** Their innovative body care line combines the power of biotechnology, fermentation and upcycling to deliver premium, eco-conscious products. Indulge in their signature hand and body wash, with notes of invigorating marine, cut grass and spiced pepper. Enjoy 15% off your first purchase with code HMGQ15 (valid until 27/01/2025). Explore their full range at **hotelmike.co.uk** and follow **@hotelmike_ on IG.**

5. Aftershave Fluid V+A by **Ecomaat** is an exceptional product that blends luxury with sustainability. This is 100% natural, free from alcohol and synthetic ingredients. Enriched with vetiver and exotic aromas, it delivers soothing post-shave relief. The innovative formula features CO2 extracts of patchouli, black pepper, ginger, and vetiver, along with essential oils of Geranium and Bulgarian Rose, delivering a hydrating experience and sensual fragrance. Visit **ecomaat.eu** and follow on IG: **@ecomaat.eu**

6. With over a decade of expertise, **Hairy Highlander** crafts organic, natural products that redefine grooming standards. Their esteemed clientele includes prestigious Highland estates, where they deliver bespoke luxury tailored to the discerning gentleman. Elevate your grooming ritual with their unparalleled commitment to quality and craftsmanship. Visit **hairyhighlander.co.uk** and follow on IG: **@hairy_highlander**

7. Liquid London For Him is a magnetic fragrance, featuring a captivating blend of pepper, bergamot, rose, mint, sandalwood, and vetiver. Designed to enhance your natural allure, it merges with your pheromones to create a unique, irresistible scent that ensures you stand out effortlessly. Unleash your confidence with this signature fragrance. Visit **liquid.london** and follow **@liquidlondon** on IG to find out more.

8. Fat Cow Skincare have created a range of grass-fed tallow skincare, and other non-toxic skincare products. The formula is natural and their range of products are designed to work harmoniously with varied skin types, aiming to provide a natural barrier that locks in moisture without leaving your pores feeling clogged. Shop online at **fatcowskin.com** and follow **@fatcowskin** on IG.

9. Exude your signature scent with **Ensar Oud**, where artisanal craftsmanship meets the world's rarest, real ingredients. Each perfume is meticulously handcrafted, giving you a deeply satisfying, immersive experience that goes above and beyond 'niche'. For fragrance connoisseurs and aficionados to embody sophistication, exclusivity, and timeless prestige.
Visit: **Ensaroud.com** and **@Ensar.Oud** on IG.

10. douxds provides the royal treatment to men experiencing acne, ingrown hairs, and dark marks. The hero product is the FLEX™ Vibrating Face Brush. It is a powerful tool used by men to help to achieve the look of smooth, clear, and fresh skin. FLEX™ is used and trusted by more than 50,000+ men and targets the most common male skin issues. Visit **douxds.com** online to find out more and follow **@douxds** on IG.

11. Arran. Discover Sannox, Scotland's first, premium men's fragrance collection. Crafted with Scottish ingredients native to the Isle of Arran, and blended with unfiltered, mineral-rich local water. Inspired by the breathtaking backdrop of Glen Sannox, where nature's beauty meets rugged charm. Immerse yourself with the scents of Leather, Amber & Oud. Visit **arran.com** and follow on IG: **@arransenseofscotland**

12. The Coco de Mer Collection is an exclusive line of perfumes from the Seychelles archipelago. Hand made in small batches they use the natural essence of the legendary Coco de Mer nut, known for its aphrodisiac properties. The fragrances capture the essence of the Seychelles, reminiscent of vibrant rainforests, pristine beaches and wild charm. For those who seek the authentic paradise-inspired scent. Visit **cocodemercosmetics.com** and follow **@cocodemerseychelles** on IG.

13. Discover the enchanting blend of Santal Oud, the latest unisex fragrance by **Thomson Carter**. Infused with the finest essences of Santal, Saffron, and Oud, it embodies pure luxury and sophistication. Immerse yourself in indulgence at **thomsoncarter.com** and elevate your senses with every spritz. Explore more on IG: **@thomsoncarter_**

14. Saint d'Ici Nsika is a natural perfume, handcrafted in Cape Town, South Africa. Each perfume is made with pure botanical ingredients and comes with a handmade ceramic flacon. "Nsika" is the isiZulu word for a central timber support of a roof in a traditional hut. Saint d'Ici Nsika eludes to a quiet and unencumbered strength, with notes of Ouhout and moss. Visit **saintdici.com** and follow **@Saint d'Ici** on IG.

15. Discover the power of simplicity with **Doma Cosmetics**' Longevyouth Cream. Designed for the modern man, this formula offers an all-in-one solution, helping your skin to feel hydrated, energised and balanced. Embrace effortless, high-performance skincare that fits seamlessly into your life, ensuring you look as good as you feel. Visit **doma-cosemtics.com** and follow **@doma.cosmetics** on IG.

16. Sourced locally from the Rocky Mountains and composed of the highest quality natural materials, **Pineward Fragrances** will transport you to remote, untamed forests. Capturing frost-laden firs, prickles of pine, spruces, thistles and misty mossy woodland, there's a forest in every handcrafted bottle. Visit **pinewardperfume.com** and **@pinewardperfume** on IG.

17. Crafted by expert barbers who witness the profound effects of hair loss daily, **HLS** offers solutions that restore confidence. The HLS Hair Enhancement Bundle comprises top-selling products, designed to combat the challenges faced from balding and thinning hair. Achieve a fuller looking hairline and instant density that can endure all day. Visit **yourhls.co.uk** and **@yourhairlosssolutions** on IG.

18. Folkwinds, fragrance for all, highlights American aromatics and artwork. Folkwinds' scent-scapes capture the beauty of North America, using the finest materials available, hand bottled in Vermont, USA. Try Sleepy Hollow, imagine yourself walking through a deciduous forest at night. Comfort yourself with the true essence of Autumn in a bottle. Visit **folkwinds.com** and follow on IG: **@folkwinds**

19. If you've been searching for a range of top-notch grooming products with a consistent fragrance, try **Oliver J. Woods**. They focus on high-quality performance without hassle, and their signature scent combines top notes of Bergamot, and Eucalyptus, middle of Patchouli and Ginger, with a base of Cedar, Sandalwood and Amber. Visit **oliverjwoods.com** and follow on IG: **@oliver.j.woods**

20. Experience the appearance of skin-smoothing with **Valuxxo**'s Regenesis B-Tox Infusion Bio. Powered by Argireline™, this formula targets expression lines, aiming to create visibly smoother, youthful skin. Valuxxo blends science with eco-conscious, organic ingredients, creating lasting results for smoother looking skin. Visit **valuxxo.com** and follow on IG: **@valuxxoofficial**

21. Neuromind Plus from **Vitabiotics**, the UK's No.1 vitamin company, is an advanced nutritional supplement to support your mind, delivering over 25 nutrients in a comprehensive formula. Providing high purity DHA which helps to maintain normal brain function, pantothenic acid which contributes to normal mental performance and iodine, iron & zinc which contribute to normal cognitive function. **Vitabiotics.com** RRP. £18.95.

22. Ned E. Williams is an ancestral fragrance of quiet legacy and intellectual allure. With rich blackberry, black tea, and a touch of felt pen ink, it evokes timeless libraries, vintage leather, and fresh cedar. Created for the discerning, it's an ode to heritage, sophistication and an astute spirit. Visit **pinkmahoghany.com** and follow on IG: **@pink_mahoghany**

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New Year, New Gear

1. Meet **Rebound Recovery**, the nutritionist-backed party recovery packs, so you can enjoy the night and conquer the morning. Rebound contains 50 natural and clean nutrients to support a full mind and body bounce back. Because dancing all night shouldn't cost you tomorrow! Find out more at **reboundrecovery.co** and **@reboundrecovery.co** on IG.

2. Born in 2021 in Porto by golf enthusiasts, **Matize Golf** is a lifestyle brand that appeals to the entire community of devoted golfers. With a modern, versatile, and sustainable approach, it aims to make golf inclusive and inspiring. Beyond designing golf fashion, it strives to enhance the game's quality in every garment, ensuring every player feels comfortable, stylish, and prepared for any challenge, before, during and after the course. Visit **matizegolf.com** and **@matizegolf** on IG.

3. No Normal Coffee is made for the outdoors. Dissolve it in both hot and cold water or use it as a spread with no refrigeration required. Containing 20 cups per tube, it's the new essential for your next outdoor adventure. Made in Switzerland. Explore more at **nonormal.com** and follow **@wearenonormal** on IG.

4. Progress Jiu Jitsu produces premium Brazilian Jiu Jitsu gear for training and competition. The Manchester-based British brand is a market leader, and highly regarded in the fast growing grappling based sport. With customer satisfaction and growth at its heart, Progress is renowned for their unbeatable product quality and clean branding. They also offer multi-sport technical clothing for non Jiu Jitsu folk. Visit **progressjj.co.uk** and **@progressjj** on IG for more.

5. Step up your shoe game this winter with **Boot Buddy**, the ultimate solution for clean footwear. Whether you're sporting fresh sneakers, new boots or sports shoes, Boot Buddy has got you covered all year. Its switchable heads ensure adaptability, making it the go-to all-in-one shoe tool for keeping your shoes clean. Visit **bootbuddy.com** and **@bootbuddy** on IG.

6. GQ's favourite packing cubes. A travel game-changer. **TILLIV**'s stylish vacuum packs are designed to add luggage capacity for modern travellers who value efficiency. A combination of innovative technology and design, you can now enjoy hassle-free packing. Pack smarter, travel lighter with TILLIV's innovative range of products. Use the code GQ10 for £7 off when you spend £115 or more at **tilliv.com** [expires 7.4.25] IG: **@tillivofficial**

7.The fastest growing sport in the US, Pickleball (a cross between tennis and table tennis), is now gaining popularity across the UK. The Yorkshire-based **Pickl** offer creative, vibrant and performance pickleball paddles from £69. These designer paddles 'escape the ordinary' by bringing a playful and art-inspired twist to the sport. Shop at **picklsports.com** and follow **@picklsports** on IG.

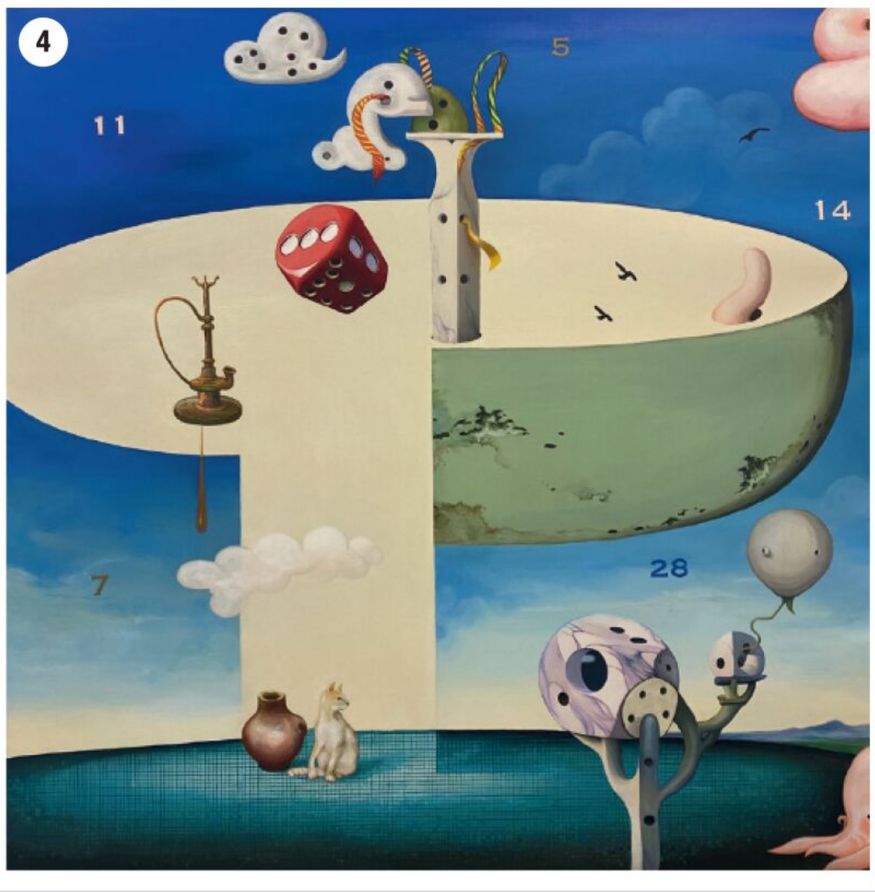
A Handsome Home

1. Tessa Coe studied physical science at Imperial College London but has drawn and painted all her life. Her work is vibrant, life-affirming and based on both direct experience of her environment and her fascination with the way that nature works. Visit **tessa-coe.work** and **@tessa1g** on IG.

2. Denise Wheelton, founder of Ginger Frog Ltd, is an artist whose work is inspired by the vibrant colours and scenery surrounding her home in Monmouth, Wales. Nature and animals play a big part in Denise's work. Commissions welcome. Visit **gingerfrogltd.co.uk** or follow **@ginger_frog_ltd** on IG.

3. Äventyr expands beyond handmade Moroccan rugs by collaborating with young Chinese artists. They believe in blending traditional craftsmanship with modern art, while maintaining a commitment to sustainability and ethical practices in all their work. Visit **aventyr.de** and follow on IG **@aventyr.shop**

4. Based in New York, **Eish Verma** is a contemporary artist. Her work spans across canvas, digital, sculptures and more. She intrinsically blends colour and emotion to create one of a kind pieces. Browse her work at **eishstudios.com** and follow on Eish on IG **@eishaav**



5. Hailey Annette is a photographer who creatively styles a calm west coast aesthetic through her images. She grew up in Newport Beach, California and received her BFA in Art & Design with a concentration in Photography from the University of California Polytechnic San Luis Obispo. She now creates landscape photography prints as fine art for interior designers. Visit **haileyannette.com** or email **haileykardos@yahoo.com**

6. PULLMAN EDITIONS designs striking original limited-edition posters that capture the enduring appeal of Art Deco. Their posters feature winter sports, glamorous resorts around the world, and historic automobiles. Over 100 designs available at £420 each. Call **020 7730 0547** or view and buy online at **pullmaneditions.com**

7. Julie Hammonds is a Devon based artist. The oil painting is of Venice, entitled 'Ancient versus Modern'. The juxtaposition of ancient Venice against the modern mainland with its docks and chimneys, draws attention to our changing climate and its impact on the rising water levels in Venice. Visit **juliehammondsfineart.com** and follow **@julie_hammonds_paintings** on IG.

Be Her Man Of The Year

1. The **ETERNAL MUSE** curlers are designed to be highly effective but comfortable to sleep in, with a unique filling of multiple fibres to make them as soft as a pillow. The product is popular for its luxe feel and cruelty-free Peau De Soie fabric – a silk alternative that causes no harm to silk worms. It pairs perfectly with the specially designed curl comb to help make the curls last longer. Visit **eternalmuse.com** IG: **@eternalmusehair**

2. INSÉRIF: where your name means luxury. INSÉRIF offer a range of luxury phone cases, tech and more - all with the option to be made bespoke with a monogram. Use code 'GQ15' for an exclusive 15% discount (expires 24/02/25). Treat yourself or a loved one at **inserif.com** IG **@inserifdesign**

3. Give the gift of glowing skin with **ISAGENIX COLLAGEN ELIXIR**. A revolutionary, ready-to-drink beauty supplement that aims to deliver visible results. Its high-quality ingredients, backed by scientific research are designed to naturally enhance your beauty regime. Experience the feeling of improved skin, hair and nail health. Explore more at **isagenix.com/share/glow** and **@isagenix_europe** on IG.

4. Simon Wright offers a complete bespoke service, making your jewellery in platinum and gold using the finest diamonds and gemstones. An appointment involves viewing stones, a short tour of the workshop, and a sit down design session all in his Clerkenwell studio workshop. By appointment only.
Visit **sw-jewellery.com** or follow on IG **@sw_jewellery**

5. The Harmony Collection, brought to you by **Vicky&Nico**, celebrates the subtle power found in the gentle curvature of spheres. Their empowering statement pieces are powerfully refined. Founder, Esther specialises in creating jewellery which stands the test of time. To view the full collection, visit: **vickyandnico.com** and **@vickyandnico** on IG.

6. French niche perfumery brand **Haute Fragrance Company** present their latest novelty, 'Lucky One', an elegant leather fragrance exuding sophistication. It opens with hypnotic violet leaves and a crisp hint of moss, unfolding into a spellbinding Olibanum heart with an addictive dry-down that lingers. Experience luxury and allure with 'Lucky One'. Shop at **hfcparis.com** and follow **@hfcparis** on IG.

7. Self-love, confidence, and body positivity. These are the founding principles of **Jule Dancewear**, a premier dance and activewear line founded and run by former Miami City Ballet dancer, Julia Cinquemani. Established in 2011, Julia addressed a need for apparel that caters to strong active women, offering them the functionality they need without compromising fashion and quality. Proudly made in the USA with worldwide shipping. Visit **juledancewear.com** and follow **@juledancewear** on IG.

8. Elevate your Christmas celebrations with twelve exquisite **ChloBo** pieces, showcasing timeless classics and exclusive designs. Wear them solo or beautifully layered to embody that signature aesthetic, seamlessly transitioning from day to night. Store your treasures in a refined case, and as each advent day unfolds, indulge in signature pieces that will see you from the festive season, to signature styling for the year to come. **chlobo.co.uk** and **@chlobojewellery** on IG.

9. Xavier Jewelers is a US-based brand that seamlessly pairs luxury with artistry. Their newest collection, a bold all-black series, captures an essence of refined elegance and modern sophistication. Discover these unique designs and elevate your style with confidence. Shop their limited edition jewellery at **xavierjewelers.com** and follow **@xavierjewelers** on IG.

10. Latham & Neve – known for their stunning contemporary hand-made British jewellery since 1997. Featured is the unique Ripple Bangle in beaten silver with 18ct gold. Ballroom bangles, awesome earrings, ravishing rings and much much more. To buy online, stockists or discover the most perfect gift, visit **lathamandneve.co.uk** and follow **@lathamneve** on IG.

11. Jinx is a niche perfume house based in the Finger Lakes region of Upstate, N.Y. creating full-spectrum, multi-dimensional, and transportive fragrances using hand-selected and often rare ingredients. Blending centuries-old olfactory extraction methods with molecular magic, Jinx compositions have distinct stages and push projection boundaries. Visit **jinxsmells.com** and follow on IG **@jinxsmells**

12. Inspired by all things magical, **BISOULOVELY** carefully craft the jewellery of your fairytale dreams. Each piece is whimsical and ethereal, with celestial motifs that are sure to be a stunning addition to your collection. With new pieces added to the collection every month, BISOULOVELY will surely be a shop you visit more than once for pieces that will speak to your inner starchild. Shop online at **bisoulovely.com** and follow on IG **@bisoulovely**

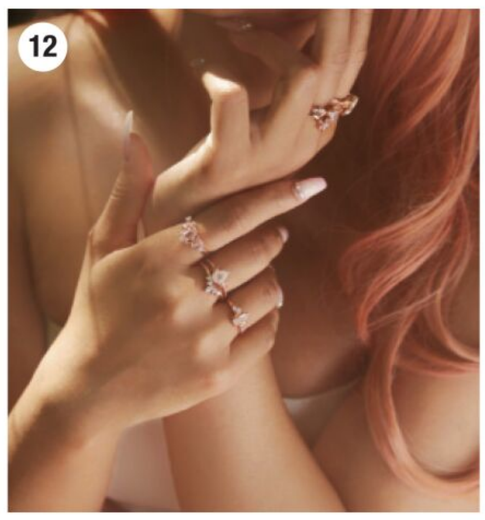
13. LOLAKO creates exquisite denim pieces from high-quality fabrics, intentionally crafted to improve with time, promoting a slow fashion approach. Their commitment to sustainability includes small production runs, recycled materials, and advanced eco-friendly technologies. Handcrafted in small batches with indigenous fabrics sourced from artisans in the Philippines, each piece reflects their dedication to quality, longevity, and style. Explore **lolako.life** and **@lolako_life** on IG.

14. nez living crafts sophisticated and sustainable stationery, offering the perfect gifting option for your loved ones and yourself. Their premium journals make a statement and convey a message of excellence, attention to detail, and a deep respect for quality. Discover their signature notebooks using code GQ15 for 15% off (expires at 31/01/2025) at **nezliving.com** Follow on IG: **@nezliving**

15. The Bisous wallet stands as the centrepiece of **Misenver**'s latest collection. Crafted with sustainable marine leather, it is ethically produced in a French tannery, utilising upcycled fish-skin waste sourced from sushi restaurants in Lyon. Embodying the essence of sustainable luxury, the wallet features lip-shaped curved cuts, ensuring effortless access to cards. Visit **misenver.com** and **@mis_en_ver** on IG.

16. Say goodbye to misplaced items with the **Careeon** Carry-All! This travel accessory easily slips over any seatback pocket to keep your items easily accessible on planes, trains, or cars. It folds neatly when not in use, keeping all your essentials within reach. Visit **careeon.com** and follow **@care.e.on** on IG.

17. This holiday season, treat your dog to **LOONAWELL**'s Lamb & Love Complete Food—crafted with organic, human-grade ingredients for an ultra-premium dining experience. Celebrate together with a taste of Swiss luxury, where every detail reflects the warmth and indulgence of the season. Discover more at **loonawell.com**



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SNOW HOMES

Get your skis on and explore some of the coolest properties around, from traditional chalets in Chamonix to contemporary houses in Colorado

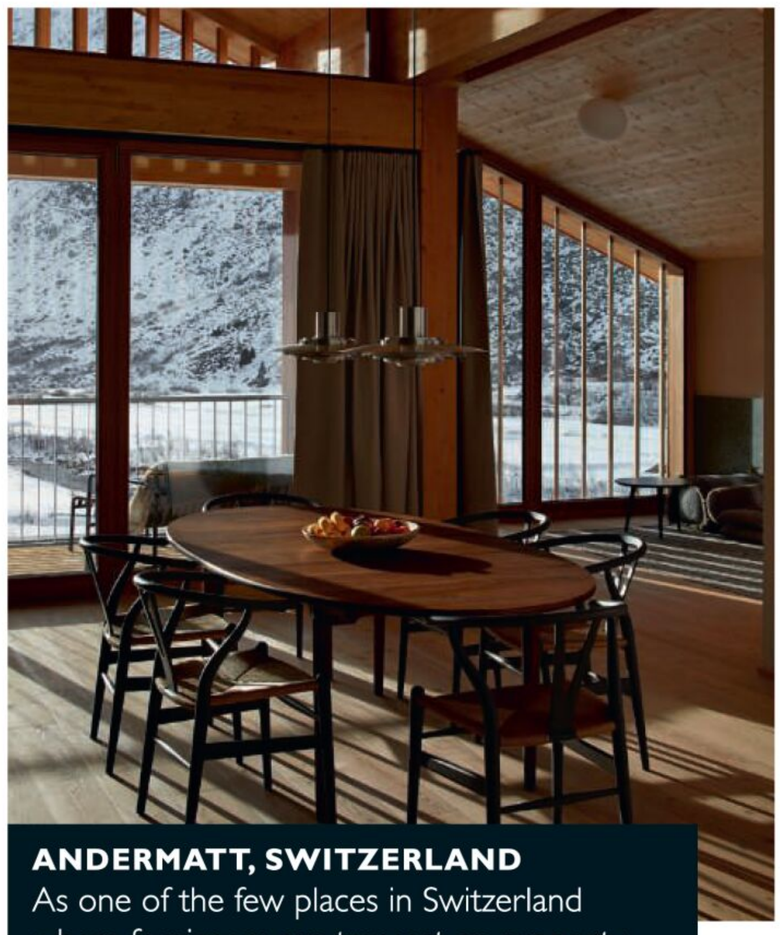
CHAMONIX, FRANCE
A few hundred metres from the Grands Montets ski area lies this brand-new chalet in the hamlet of Les Grassonnets. It has five bedrooms, five bathrooms and a huge, open-plan living area with fantastic views of the Mont Blanc mountain range. Highlights include the indoor pool, the sauna and the cinema room. €4.95 million.
knightfrank.com

As winter sets in and the temperatures drop, the lure of the mountains beckons and skiers jet off in search of fresh powder. When it comes to purchasing a second home, a ski property often sits right at the top of people's wish-list investments – there's the potential to enjoy it in the summer as well as in the colder months, and the possibility of generating an additional source of income by letting it out.

'The ski property market is alive and well,' says Jeremy Rollason of Savills. 'After a relatively slow start to the year, buyers have since returned with purpose.' He cites two factors that have been particularly beneficial. The first is the general lowering of interest rates over the past months – not just in the UK, but also in Switzerland and by the European Central Bank – and the second is an easing of prices following the buying frenzy in 2021 and 2022.

'This has created a more benign

COLORADO, US
With the ability to ski straight to the door, 27 Boulder Circle in the heart of Breckenridge is a newly built, six-bedroom property that combines adventure with convenience – it's a short stroll to the main street yet is surrounded by some spectacular peaks. $7,645,000.
christiesrealestate.com



ANDERMATT, SWITZERLAND
As one of the few places in Switzerland where foreigners can transact on property without any restrictions, Andermatt is an appealing location for overseas buyers. There's great snow, challenging terrain and plenty of fantastic properties. Pictured here is the penthouse apartment in the 11-unit Elva development – it has four bedrooms, a large terrace and its own hot tub. CHF6.75 million.
andermatt-realestate.ch

COURCHEVEL 1850, FRANCE
Sleeping 16 people in comfort, this spacious chalet spans three floors and a basement. Occupying a prime spot in the smart resort of Courchevel 1850, it's conveniently placed for access to the ski shops, lifts, bars, restaurants and other amenities. As it's newly built, buyers have the option to complete it to their own taste. €32.4 million.
hamptons-international.com

MADONNA DI CAMPIGLIO, ITALY
Nestled among the snowy peaks of the Trentino Dolomites, this elegant nine-bedroom chalet was completely rebuilt in 2011 to create a rustic retreat. Reclaimed wood gives the interiors a traditional feel, while the mountain views provide a scenic backdrop that changes with the seasons. €5.48 million.
sothebysrealty.com

AUGUST PREMIUM COLLECTION, EUROPE
Instead of committing to a single address, why not consider five? August is a clever take on the time-share model, offering the option to buy into a set of five different properties in various locations. Pictured is a chalet in the French Alps that forms part of its Premium collection – it sleeps up to 10 and has a sauna and hot tub. €700,000 for a share.
augustcollections.com

CHAMONIX, FRANCE

This recently renovated, seven-bedroom chalet is located in the heart of Chamonix, enviably close to the pistes. Spanning four floors, it's notable for its excellent spa facilities – there's a plunge pool, Jacuzzi, sauna and hammam. €8.95 million.
savills.com

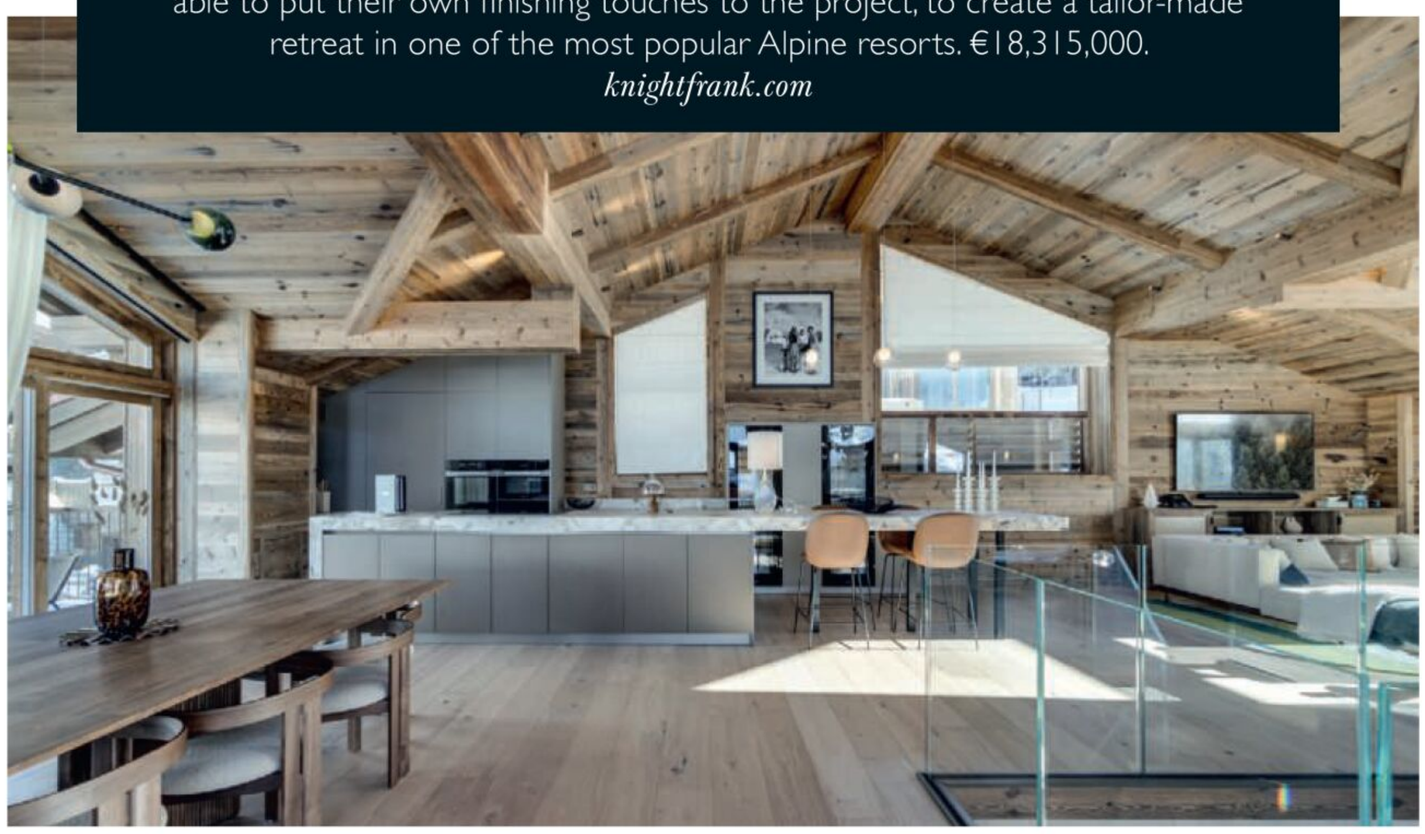
environment for patient buyers looking to re-enter the market, and we consequently anticipate an active six months ahead,' concludes Rollason.

Aside from the legal and financial aspects, there are a number of unique considerations when buying a ski property. Each resort has its own appeal and atmosphere – from the glamour of St Moritz and Gstaad to the vast open spaces of Les Trois Vallées – which is why it is worth exploring as many areas as possible before committing to a specific location. Proximity to an airport is important if you're intending to visit regularly, as is the general accessibility, especially when navigating steep roads in treacherous conditions. The distance to the nearest piste or ski lift is another often-overlooked factor – sometimes just getting on to the mountain can feel like a journey in itself. In terms of the actual property, consider what suits you best. A chalet provides more space and autonomy but requires more upkeep, while an apartment is more of a 'lock up and leave' option.

For those fortunate few who are on the hunt for a ski home, there's something to suit every taste. As the snow starts to fall and a new season gets underway, now is the ideal time to discover what's on offer.

VAL D'ISÈRE, FRANCE

With soaring ceilings and generous open-plan spaces, this seven-bedroom apartment in Silverstone Lodge is situated at the foot of the slopes. Owners will be able to put their own finishing touches to the project, to create a tailor-made retreat in one of the most popular Alpine resorts. €18,315,000.
knightfrank.com



Photograph: **Lake Flato**

ASPEN, US

Set in the sought-after environs of Snowmass Village, Residence 8 on 411 Wood Road is a four-bedroom house that was built in 2022, with high ceilings and large windows imbuing the interiors with space and light. The ability to ski in and ski out adds to its considerable appeal. $16.8 million.
christiesrealestate.com

THE

WHITELEY

LONDON

THE DESIGNER COLLECTION

Introducing the Designer Collection at The Whiteley. Designing the next apartment in the collection, Linda Boronkay brings an eclectic aesthetic rich with layers of texture and colour. This apartment, like many others in the building features wide spanning terraces, west and east facing. Apartment prices from £5m.

Watch apartment tour here:

THEWHITELEYLONDON.COM

+44 (0)20 37 736 678

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WINTER FAIR

The Chelsea Barracks Winter Fair returns to celebrate the season, in partnership with *House & Garden* magazine

This Christmas, *House & Garden* is partnering with Chelsea Barracks for the first time in their beloved Winter Fair, a short walk from Sloane Square. Experience our artisan market and a host of other festive entertainments on November 30 and December 1. While the residences of Chelsea Barracks (including the new apartments at 9 Mulberry Square) are deeply covetable, the beautiful garden squares are always open to the public, and the Winter Fair, which is free and open to all, makes this the perfect time to visit. The market will be a big draw for Christmas shoppers, with stalls by some of our favourite independent interiors brands, such as Skye McAlpine Tavola, LAMP LDN, and Maison Margaux, plus luxurious gifting offerings from Eldon Cashmere and Tolstoy Edit.

In addition to the market itself, Chelsea Barracks will play host to a grotto where children can meet Father Christmas, a choir filling the air with carols, and stalls offering an array of indulgent food. The Campaner, Chelsea Barracks' acclaimed Catalonian restaurant, makes the ideal place to stop in for a warming lunch. While you're there, don't miss Skye McAlpine's brilliant advice on festive entertaining – tickets for her talk on Saturday 30 November at 3pm are on sale now for £15.

1-5 bedroom residences are available at 9 Mulberry Square, with prices starting from £3.4m.

CHELSEA BARRACKS CHRISTMAS FAIR

Saturday 30 November - 11.00-18.00

Sunday 1 December - 11.00-18.00

To book tickets to Skye's Christmas Talk please visit ***chelseabarracks.com*** *or* ***HGCBChristmasFair.eventbrite.com***

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CONDÉ NAST

BRITAIN | PROPERTY

At a time when the dream home has become more of a focus than ever, Condé Nast Property shines a *spotlight* on the *key players* and the most exciting new developments delivering the property idyll *this autumn*

Discover life as it should be in Tuban El Gouna, a new vibrant district in the Red Sea seaside town from master 'place makers', Orascom Development

Centre Stage

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

Life As It Should Be

Pioneers in luxury 'place making', *Orascom Developmen*t creates fully integrated *vibrant* and *sustainable communities* from Switzerland to the Red Sea, the Middle East to Montenegro. The latest launch is *Tuban*, the *new heart of waterfront* living in El Gouna, Egypt

Clockwise from top: Omar El Hamamsy, Group CEO of Orascom Development Group, which creates sustainable and integrated communities; El Gouna, Egypt; Luštica Bay, Montenegro and Andermatt Swiss Alps, Switzerland

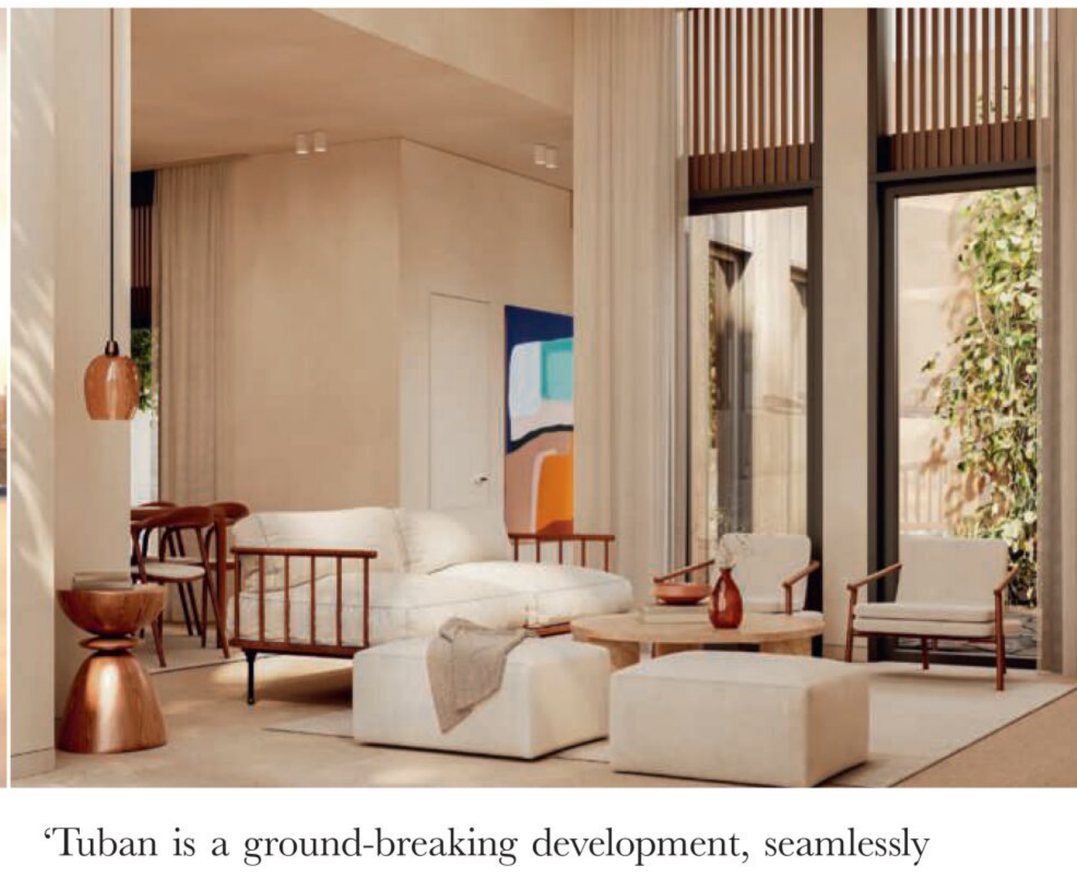
Andermatt Swiss Alps in Switzerland, Luštica Bay in Montenegro, Hawana Salalah in Oman, West Carclaze Garden Village in Cornwall and, of course, El Gouna, the stunning town on the Red Sea that began to take shape 35 years ago and established Orascom Development as a leading 'place maker' in the industry. These life-enhancing sustainable communities – created from barren land in mountains and seaside across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa – are thriving, connected, thrillingly characterful communities. Planned from A to Z according to people's needs and aspirations, they offer residents and visitors 'life as it should be'.

Most developers would shy away from the complex challenge of creating luxury lifestyle towns from nothing, but Orascom Development's visionary founder Samih Sawiris saw unlimited potential in the prospect of master-planning communities of homes, hotels, schools, hospitals and marinas, with commercial and cultural hubs. 'I have a lot of patience and the persistence to take as much time as is needed to turn a project into what I have envisioned in my dreams,' he once said of his trailblazing stance.

Today Omar El Hamamsy, Group CEO, continues the mission to redefine community by integrating architectural and design principles. From the long-term planning of infrastructure to the icing-on-the-cake provision of cultural venues, development is honed by insights gleaned from the new Keys of Life thought leadership initiative he launched to ascertain diverse perspectives. 'Through Orascom Development Keys of Life we uncover what truly matters on how people want to live, work, play and stay in today's modern world,' says El Hamamsy. 'This research offers a unique lens through which we can understand evolving trends, helping us design communities that transcend geographic and cultural boundaries.'

Passion and purpose is the lifeblood of a flourishing community. A common thread all of in Orascom Development's destinations is a sense of a curated life, whereby residents and visitors benefit from the stunning locale, the serenity that comes from indoor-outdoor living and working.

Whether you are seeking a primary or second, third or fourth home, know that Orascom Development delivers on its promise above and beyond expectations.



Those visiting El Gouna hail the beauty of its setting on the sparkling waters of the Red Sea. Celebrated as a thriving town, its topography includes four marinas, lagoons and beaches – a paradise for those who love to be at one with nature enjoying a rejuvenating lifestyle. Imagine yacht trips to snorkel in crystal-clear water, kite surfing and a sunset horse riding adventure in the desert. Magical!

Started in 1989, El Gouna is the first of Orascom Development's fully integrated towns and the long-term realisation of Samih Sawiris's original dream of a splendid seaside town inhabited by a community of international kindred spirits with wellbeing at its heart. Today it is just that, for both full-time residents (benefitting from a hospital, schools and workspaces for digital nomads) and visitors to its hotels, which include The Chedi, part of The Leading Hotels of the World portfolio.

El Gouna is abuzz with the launch of Tuban, a district set to be the 'new heart of town', located minutes away from El Gouna Conference and Cultural Centre, Abu Tig Marina and Downtown. In line with Orascom Development's Keys of Life insights – which found that 76% of people want to enjoy open-access views overlooking communal parks, plazas or gardens – the scale of the master plan is impressive, with residential properties set in a mixed-use environment that will feature marinas, a boutique hotel and a commercial district.

'Tuban is a ground-breaking development, seamlessly integrating residential, commercial, entertainment, medical, senior living and hospitality offerings into one central location. This project marks a significant milestone in the town's evolution, reinforcing its status as a sought-after, fully integrated destination,' says Mohamed Amer, CEO of El Gouna. 'A unique blend of secure investment and tranquil living in a sustainable environment, the community boasts cutting-edge architectural design that matches global standards, ensuring residents experience the highest levels of comfort. Additionally, it offers promising investment opportunities, making it an ideal long-term choice for investors.'

The first phase of Tuban El Gouna will be delivered in early 2027.

For more information, please visit orascomdevelopment.com or elgouna.com.

Tuban, a new 'heart' for the seaside town of El Gouna, will add further vibrancy to the waterfront idyll. Right: El Gouna CEO Mohamed Amer

Windows on a Wonderland

Boundless natural beauty, a snow-sure resort and the holy grail of hygge… *Discover a new paradise* for owning a ski-in, ski-out property in Kvitfjell, Norway via *Savills* – on slopes that will host seven World Cup events this season

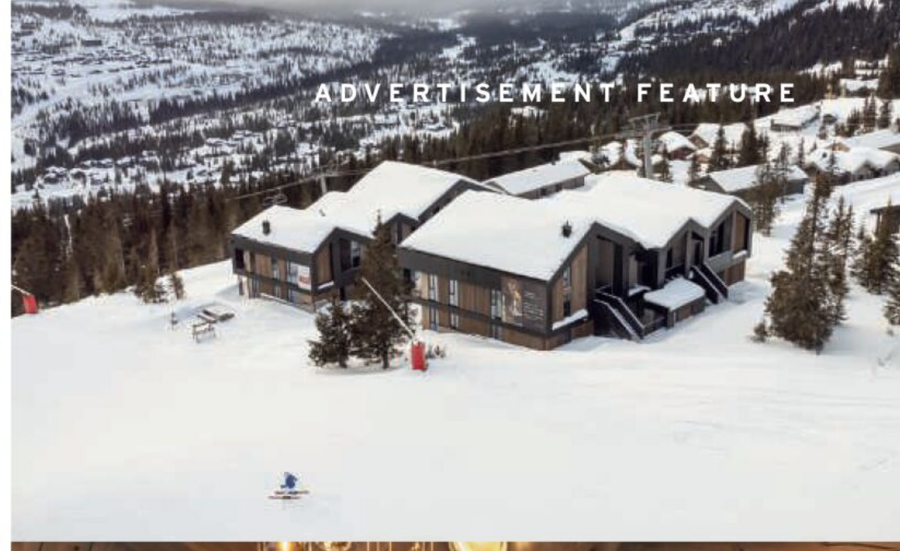
Long live the Scandinavian concept of hygge, meaning the warm glow of cosiness, contentment and conviviality. As the wintry weather starts to bite, nowhere does the notion of roaring fires and traditional wood-chalet comfort seem more alluring than in Norway. Here, gathering with family to spend quality time in the pristine, snowy mountainscape has long been a custom. It's all about relaxation and enjoying small pleasures among friends and loved ones.

Picture an expanse of alpine slopes with snow-dusted fir trees and cosy log cabins, each with panoramic A-frame windows ablaze with a golden warmth. Imagine skiing in and out from your own front door, or preparing hot chocolate for children who are safely enjoying the fun slopes nearby; chatting with friends around a firepit or sitting in a hot tub on your private terrace absorbing the nocturnal beauty of Peer Gynt's Kingdom. Norwegians certainly know how to embrace seasonal opportunities in the Great Outdoors.

Why not follow suit and invest in your own luxury mountain bolthole in a snow-sure resort that has some of the best quality slopes in Europe? Oslo is a mere two-hour flight from the UK and Kvitfjell, a resort developed for the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, is the perfect place for families who love alpine sports – and indeed biking, cross-country hiking, rafting and fishing in serene mountain terrain when the snow melts to reveal the greenest valleys.

No longer a best-kept secret, properties in Kvitfjell are a buzz topic (this year the proportion of foreign buyers was 36.7%, a rise of 8% from 2023). This is thanks to its huge variety of uncrowded slopes – from child-designated areas to black runs with Olympic standards, perfect snow conditions from November to May, and glorious summers that see timber cabin roofs come alive with green vegetation to blend into the environment.

The LHM Group offers luxury ski-in, ski-out apartments in Svartskard, a stone's throw from Kvitfjell's prestigious ski facilities. Specialists in turnkey properties built in



Opposite: triple-glazed windows frame serene views and allow natural light to flood apartments full of furniture custom-made for conviviality. This page, clockwise from top left: a showcase window connects the indoors with outdoor life; ski-in, ski-out to your cabin; contemporary light fittings create a warm ambience; summer views over green cabin roofs; a high-quality turnkey mountain home

traditional style and tastefully designed with open floorplans, their chic lock-up-and-leave apartments showcase contemporary interior design on a scale that accommodates high ceilings, triple-glazed windows, LED-lit staircases and heated oak-parquet flooring that even extends to outdoor terraces.

Also available from LHM in Kvitfjell are ski-in, ski-out mountain homes in the cabin-only area called Laftestolen. These feature 10 or more comfortable beds. Clever design includes nooks that accommodate full-size single beds in the living area – sure to appeal to younger family members – and principal bedrooms that boast hot tub, sauna and walk-in wardrobes.

'The quality of craftsmanship is outstanding,' notes Deyan Visser of Savills. Every element is prefabricated in-house, in a purpose-built factory in Lithuania, and assembled in situ in Norway – from the standout staircases to bespoke furniture custom-made for each apartment or home. (A further option is to acquire a fully furnished property, right down to opulent artwork, bed linen, towels and china.)

Whether you opt for an apartment or a stand-alone mountain home, the result is a breathtaking interpretation of the indoor/outdoor lifestyle. Serenity is the watchword, underpinned by practicality. Prices for a 3- or 4-bedroom apartment with heated garage and ski/boot locker are £615,000 to £1.27m*, and 4- and 5-bedroom cabins £745,000 to £1.1m*.

**Prices quoted are sterling equivalent at time of press. All contracts in Norwegian Krone.*

For more information, please visit savills.com/ski or email Deyan.visser@savills.com

A Private Slice of Paradise

The west coast of Barbados is synonymous with a time-honoured world of *privacy and stability*. Here, close to the Sandy Lane Hotel, *One Caribbean Estates* offers Cove Spring House, a villa that is truly the *pinnacle of luxury*

In 1947 the British politician Ronald Tree built Heron Bay, a romantic neo-Palladian villa constructed of pink coral stone amid tropical foliage on the beachfront of the as yet undiscovered west coast of Barbados. It was 'like a house out of Atlantis', marvelled his daughter Penelope. Further establishing himself as a vacation-spot myth-maker, Tree later went on to help transform Sandy Lane from a sugar plantation into a glamorous five-star resort synonymous with refined glamour – marking the start of an era which saw this exquisite stretch of white sand and sparkling sea become a utopia for the jet set.

The stories from this era of a sunny playground for the rich and famous are legendary. Aristotle Onassis once rowed ashore from his yacht while Maria Callas swam alongside, a pet marmoset on her back. David Niven conjured cocktails at Sandy Lane's bar. The roll call of illustrious visitors included such Hollywood stars and heads of state as Queen Elizabeth II and Princess Margaret, Greta Garbo and Jackie Onassis, Sir Winston Churchill and, more recently, Luciano Pavarotti, Elton John, Mick Jagger, Rihanna and Gwyneth Paltrow.

For some 70 years, the Platinum Coast, as it is dubbed in reference to that rarest of most precious metals, has enjoyed a strong tradition in gorgeous beachfront villas. Some of the most remarkable were the work of Oliver Messel, the theatre, film and set designer who settled in the St James enclave of the island and applied his creative flair to making 'wonderlands' of holiday homes for his social set. To this day, Barbados is like a secret club, attracting an international elite with a sense of magnificence – people who intuitively appreciate this singular coastline as a spot where heritage, discretion and understated luxury create a sophistication beyond dreams.

One thing's for sure: this is a rock-solid place to invest in property and revel in the relaxed ambience of an island with a stable government and still-tangible historic links to the United Kingdom. Remaining the address of choice for discerning investors and owners, this fabled seafront offers a lifestyle so rarefied that opportunities to invest in a mega mansion are few and far between. Cove Spring House is one such rare and exceptional property to come to market via Chris Parra – CEO of the leading independent boutique brokerage One Caribbean Estates and a new affiliate of Colliers International, a global leader in real estate services and investment management.

Cove Spring House sits atop a coral cliff, surrounded by lush gardens, with a private beach. The sunlight on the pink coral stone conjures a magical aura. An extensive front terrace boasts sweeping views of the Caribbean Sea with spacious indoor/outdoor living areas. This style follows the fashion started back in the 1960s by Hollywood star Claudette Colbert, whose great pride was her dining room, open to the elements but furnished with chandeliers, mirrors and wall sconces. With 10 bedrooms and lavish bathrooms, Cove Spring boasts its own grand entertaining credentials, complemented by a professionally equipped kitchen.

'The mansion is a masterpiece of design, offering unparalleled privacy and encapsulating the essence of luxury Caribbean living,' says Parra. Landscaped with an infinity pool, water features and a koi pond, the garden harmonises with its surroundings. Underpinning its desirable features, the location is what makes Cove Spring House one of the most coveted properties for sale in Barbados. The villa benefits from being situated in Saint James parish, this area renowned for its exclusivity and world-class amenities, fine dining, luxury shopping and top-class sports. The nearby Sandy Lane Country Club has lush green golf courses (The Old Nine, The Country Club and the world renowned Green Monkey), a spa and highly regarded restaurant options.

Ownership of a mansion in this gilded spot has become a status symbol for the elite. Join the club and you too can enjoy the paradise lifestyle on the Platinum Coast on your own terms.

Onecaribbeanestates.com

Above and opposite, Cove Spring House, the embodiment of luxury Barbados living, is offered for sale through Chris Parra (far right), CEO of One Caribbean Estates

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Introducing Bankside Yards

The *trailblazing* new cultural, workplace and refined residential hub on the *South Bank*, masterminded by *NATIVE LAND*, will be the first significant fossil fuel-free mixed-use development in the United Kingdom

The Thames riverscape in central London is notable for its distinctive pockets of cultural history, neighbourhoods that have ebbed and flowed in fortune and splendour through centuries of colourful history. The South Bank is one such landmark stretch where, today, Bankside Yards represents a remarkable renewal of a lost city intersection, creating a new 1.4 million sq ft 'hyper mixed-use' epicentre that links treasured arts institutions with new residential hubs and ESG-focused prime office buildings, underpinned by an impressive commitment to sustainability.

This unique project from developer Native Land will comprise eight key buildings that will provide homes, retail, workspace and hospitality alongside historic railway arches that have been closed to the public since the 19th century; their restoration will add a new dynamic to the area, providing 50,000 sq ft for restaurants, bars and retail as well as space to host a curated series of pop-up events and installations. In a landmark announcement, the prestigious Mandarin Oriental hospitality brand has chosen Bankside Yards to be the site of its third London hotel.

Designed for future smart living, each of the Bankside Yards buildings will be served by a 5th Generation thermal energy sharing network, the largest fossil fuel-free energy-efficient operation of its kind in the UK. Arbor, the next-generation office building designed with sustainability, technology and wellbeing at its core, was the first building to complete and is already 75% let. Apartments in the first residential building, Opus, will launch in early 2025.

Within easy reach of four national rail stations, two riverboat piers and six London Underground stations, and close to Covent Garden, the North Bank and the financial district, Bankside Yards is a uniquely well-connected, forward-thinking offering. With more than 50% of the site allocated as public realm, it is a special space, as Alasdair Nicholls, Chief Executive of Native Land, confirms: 'Bankside Yards represents a truly unique proposition. More than an address, this scheme paves the way for next-generation smart living and working in the capital.'

For more information, please visit banksideyards.com and @banksideyards

Clockwise from above left: an overview of the Bankside Yards development on the South Bank; the future Mandarin Oriental hotel at Bankside Yards; a view across the Thames towards St Paul's Cathedral

ESCAPE TO THE LAKES BY YOO: THE ULTIMATE COTSWOLDS RETREAT

Nestled within the idyllic Cotswolds, The Lakes by Yoo is more than just a luxurious getaway-it's a way of life. Perfectly poised for those seeking an opulent escape from the city without compromising on style or comfort, this stunning development offers a unique blend of world-class architecture, tranquil surroundings, and access to outdoor pursuits. Whether you're looking to own, rent, or simply spend a few days indulging in its splendor, The Lakes by Yoo promises an unparalleled lifestyle, capturing the essence of modern country living.

The story of Lakes by Yoo begins with renowned developer John Hitchcox, cofounder of the trailblazing design collective Yoo. With a reputation for blending high-end architecture with natural beauty, Hitchcox brought his creative vision to life in the heart of the Cotswolds. Teaming up with celebrated designer Philippe Starck, they envisioned a place where contemporary luxury would meet untouched natural landscapes-a retreat that fosters a deep connection with the environment without sacrificing modern comfort. And so, The Lakes by Yoo was born, a sanctuary for those seeking serenity without leaving behind urban sophistication.

Owning a home at The Lakes by Yoo is the ultimate lifestyle investment. With an array of bespoke lakeside homes designed by globally renowned names such as Kelly Hoppen, Jade Jagger, and Kate Moss, the opportunity to curate a unique living space is unmatched. Each property is meticulously crafted, blending natural materials with sleek, contemporary designs that reflect the surrounding beauty of the estate's 850-acre expanse. Imagine waking up to uninterrupted views of sparkling lakes and sprawling woodland, enjoying a morning coffee on your private terrace, or spending summer afternoons paddleboarding on the lake. The estate is secured by a 24-hour concierge and security service, ensuring complete peace of mind for homeowners, while still feeling intimate and secluded.

Whether you choose to make The Lakes by Yoo your permanent home, holiday retreat, or simply visit for a corporate event or personal escape, you'll enjoy access to five-star resort-style amenities. With a luxury spa, wellness centre, and a range of outdoor pursuits, the estate caters to both relaxation and productivity. Ideal for executive wellness programmes or team-building activities, everything from yoga and nature walks to water sports and private meeting spaces can be customised to suit leisure or corporate needs. Life at The Lakes is as active or as relaxing as you wish. For fitness enthusiasts, there's an endless array of activities, from wild swimming to yoga classes, forest hikes, and water sports. Wellness sits at the heart of the experience, with the estate offering everything from high-tech fitness studios to personalised training sessions and nutrition advice. Even the simple act of living surrounded by water and woodland has a calming, rejuvenating effect that's impossible to replicate in urban environments.

Families will find The Lakes by Yoo to be a true paradise. With dedicated children's clubs, outdoor adventure areas, and kid-friendly activities like den-building and treasure hunts, there's no shortage of ways for little ones to explore and engage with nature.

For those seeking quiet reflection, private fishing spots, secluded picnic areas, and woodland walks offer a peaceful respite from daily life. Whether you're seeking a weekend retreat or the chance to own a piece of the English countryside, The Lakes by Yoo provides an unrivaled opportunity to embrace the very best of Cotswolds living. With a unique combination of designer homes, world-class amenities, and access to nature's playground, it is an experience like no other. With homes starting at £1.4 million, The Lakes by Yoo offers not just a residence, but an invitation to join a community of like-minded individuals who value luxury and a connection to nature.

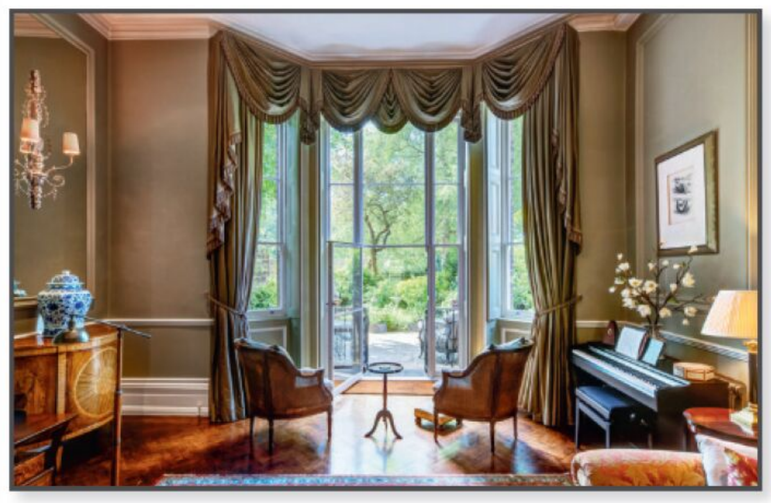
ACCOMMODATION & AMENITIES

- Entrance Vestibule
- Reception Hall
- 24' Drawing Room
- 'Plain English' Bespoke Kitchen/Breakfast Room
- Principal Bedroom with En Suite Bathroom
- Three/Four Further Bedrooms
- Family Bathroom
- Guest WC
- Utility Room
- Top Floor Summer Room
- South Facing Roof Terrace
- 40' Landscaped Walled Garden
- Garden Shed
- Wine Cellar

UPPER TERRACE

HAMPSTEAD VILLAGE NW3

ON THE MARKET FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ALMOST 25 YEARS, THIS STUNNING FIVE STOREY, BAY FRONTED GRADE II LISTED GEORGIAN HOME, BUILT CIRCA 1740, FEATURING A DELIGHTFUL 40' SOUTHERLY FACING WALLED GARDEN AND 18' ROOF TERRACE WITH FAR REACHING PANORAMIC VIEWS.



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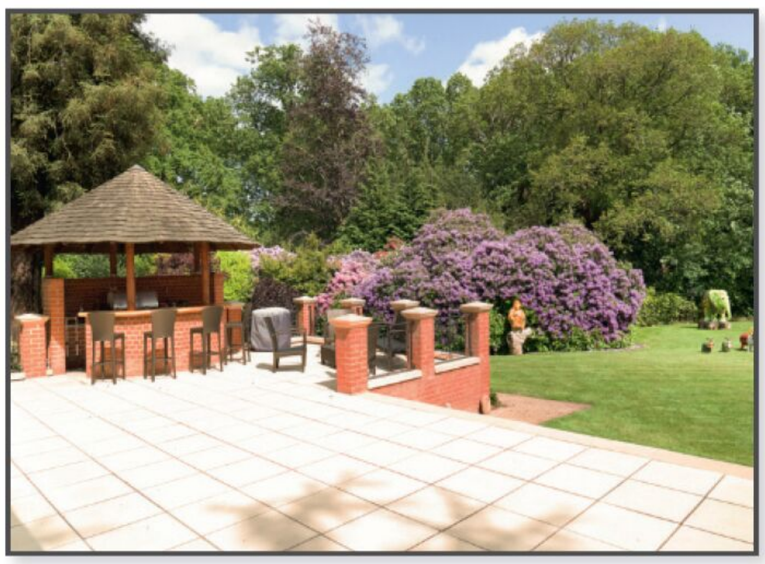
ACCOMMODATION & AMENITIES

- Entrance Vestibule
- Reception Hall
- Drawing Room
- Family Room
- Dining Room
- Conservatory/Garden room
- Sitting room
- Kitchen Breakfast Room
- Principal Bedroom Suite with En suite Dressing room, Bathroom and terrace
- Three further first floor suites
- Two Second floor bedrooms Family Bathroom
- Secondary Entrance
- Guest Cloakroom Utility Room
- Wine Cellar
- Extensive Internal and External Storage

Detached former garage block comprising:

- Sports room/Bar
- Office
- Guest bedroom with en suite shower room
- Gymnasium
- Extensive Grounds
- Gated off street parking for 25/30 vehicles



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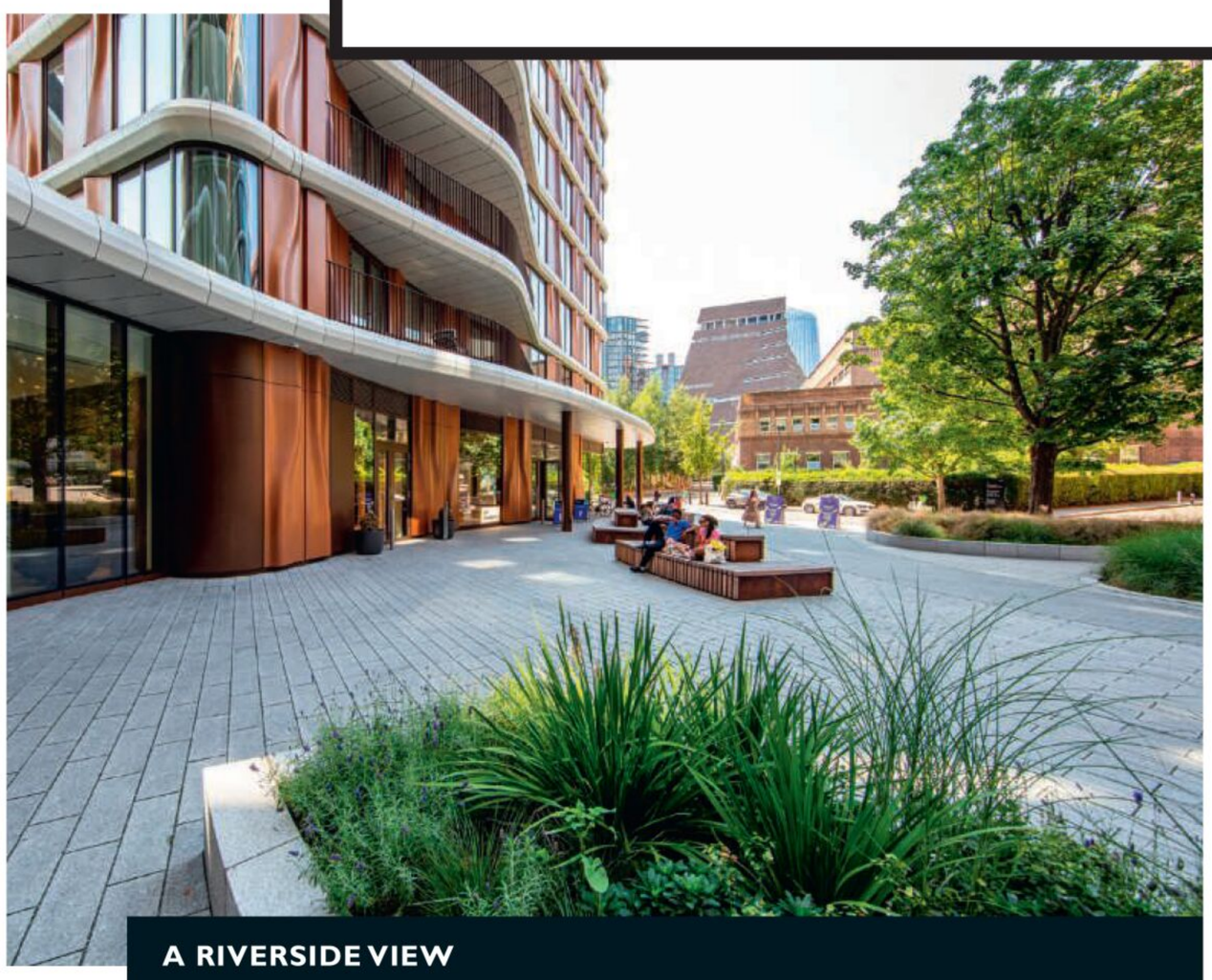
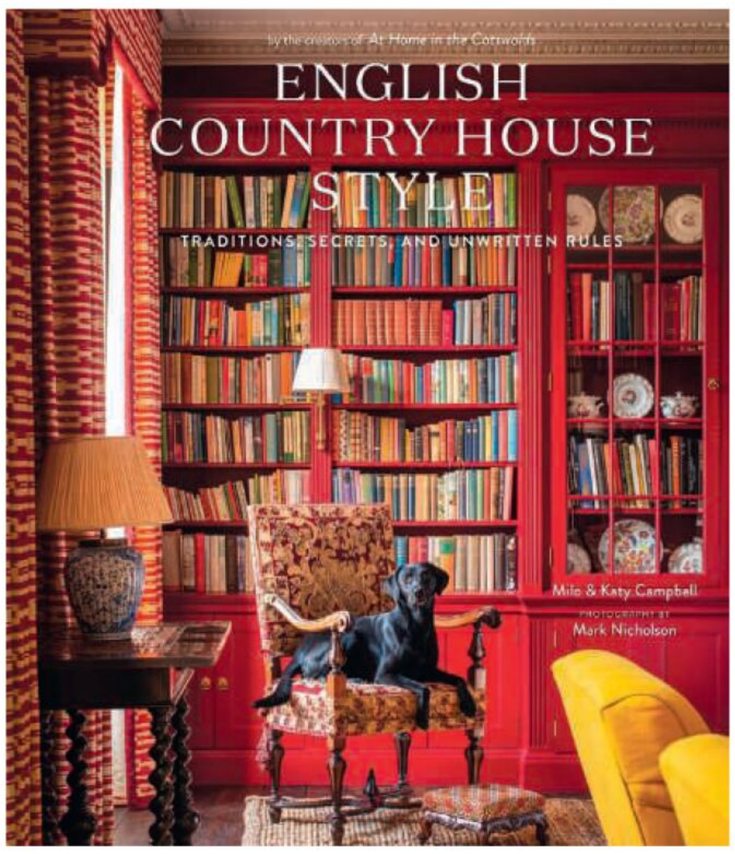


A RIVERSIDE VIEW

Live in the cultural heart of the capital at Triptych Bankside, the award-winning scheme by JTRE London on the South Bank. Designed by the internationally acclaimed architects Squire & Partners, it consists of three towers, with distinctive, rippling curves inspired by the waters of the River Thames. The 169 apartments have hotel-style amenities, while at ground level, the retail units include a deli, a gym and a coffee shop. The development is also home to Art Academy London's new campus, adding to the area's creative atmosphere, with spaces and workshops open to the public. Apartments from £945,000.

For more information, call 020 7620 3424 or visit triptychbankside.com


by the creators of At Home in the Cotswolds
ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE STYLE
TRADITIONS, SECRETS, AND UNWRITTEN RULES
Milo & Katy Campbell
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Mark Nicholson

DECORATION DECODED

There is a particular aesthetic that has become firmly associated with the English country house – elegant, comfortable, richly layered and often a little eccentric. A new book by Milo and Katy Campbell celebrates the idiosyncrasies of these enduring interiors, along with photographs of more than 40 country houses around the UK. Key areas are explored in detail, including the boot room, the downstairs loo and the ever-popular drinks table.

'English Country House Style: Traditions, Secrets, and Unwritten Rules' by Milo and Katy Campbell (Abrams; £40) is out now

CREATE YOUR ESCAPE

Established over 50 years ago in Portugal's Ria Formosa Natural Park, Quinta do Lago is one of the world's most exclusive residential and golfing resorts, occupying some of the finest countryside in the Algarve. Now, there's a final opportunity to invest in a pristine piece of land on which to build an entirely bespoke private home. North Grove comprises 13 plots overlooking the iconic North Course, and buyers will have the opportunity to enjoy full access to the resort's many attractions. The last decade has seen Quinta do Lago invest more than €60 million in amenities – recent additions include new restaurants, padel courts and a Pilates studio.

For more information, call 00 351 289 392 754 or contact realestate@quintadolago.com

STRIKE A POSE

There's a reason why Florianópolis in southern Brazil is often referred to as Ilha da Magia, or 'magic island' – venture beyond the city and you'll discover stunning natural landscapes and an abundance of sandy beaches, which range from hidden coves to world-class surf spots. For those seeking a picture-perfect retreat, Casalvan is one of the most stylish guesthouses in the region. Surrounded by lush, tropical vegetation, with whitewashed walls, an outdoor pool, and a simple yet effortlessly chic interior, it has become a popular spot for discerning travellers, as well as a sought-after location for photoshoots.

For more information, visit https://linktr.ee/casaivan or view the Instagram account @casaivan

A HELLENIC HIDEAWAY

Located on one of Crete's beautiful beachfronts, just one mile from the ancient town of Agios Nikolaos, is St Nicolas Bay Resort Hotel & Villas, which combines traditional Greek hospitality with modern design. Guests can enjoy Mediterranean dining at the resort's five restaurants and two bars, as well as the state-of-the-art spa and a range of brand-new sports facilities. Its latest addition is Thalassa Villas, a collection of eight new guesthouses with spectacular sea views and private pools.

For more information, visit stnicolasbay.gr and thalassavillas.gr

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A good property advisor not only opens the door to the best homes before they come to market, but makes the transaction process as seamless and stress-free as possible, from the first offer through to completion and beyond. Independently owned Middleton Advisors has been working collaboratively with private clients to identify, buy, sell and hold properties in London and southern England since 2008, with more than £1.5 billion of transactions to date. The 30 employees specialise in particular locations and sectors, providing clients with a powerful advantage in an ever-changing market, thanks to their expert advice, individual approach and absolute professionalism.

For more information, call 01235 436270 or visit middletonadvisors.com

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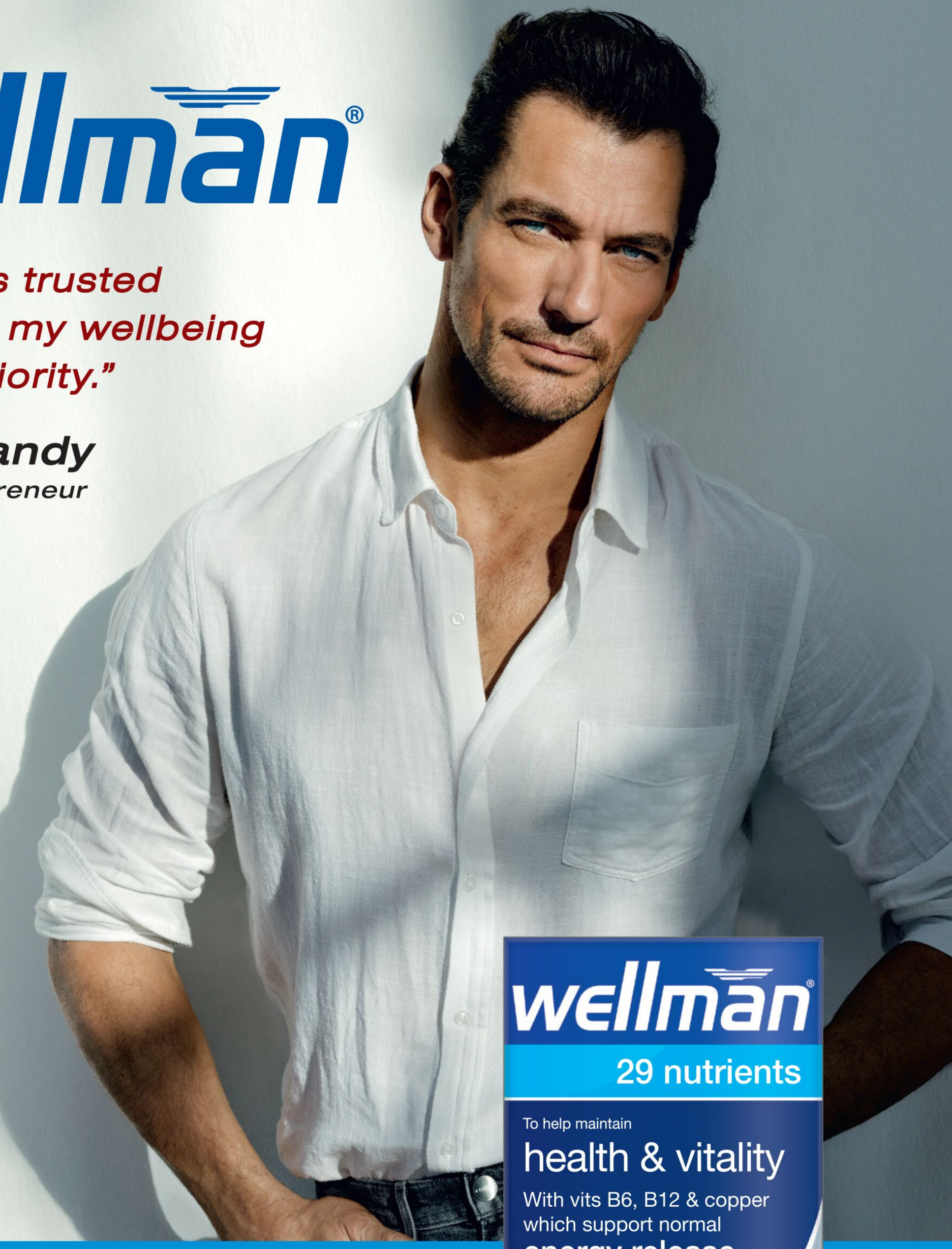

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ON THE ART OF BUILDING A COLLECTION

WHAT MAKES A ROLEX A ROLEX?

It's not the wheels and cogs. It's not the steel we shape nor the gold we forge. It's not the sum of every single part that we design, craft, polish and assemble with countless skills and constant care. It's the time it takes. The numerous days and months that are necessary until we can print this single word on each individual dial leaving our workshops: ***"Superlative."*** It's the mark of our autonomy, responsibility and integrity. This is all we make, but we make it all. So that, in time, you can make it your own.

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THE COLOUR OF EXCELLENCE

This is our green seal. Since 2015, it is the new mark of our watchmaking excellence. There is nothing to distinguish it from any official seal, yet its inscriptions and colour make it unique. Its green hue attests to the superlative standards of both quality and performance to which we hold every single element of any and all of our watches: precision, water-resistance, autonomy, reliability and durability. For this simple seal bore witness to the epic journey each has undergone in our workshops, from initial sketch to final tests before shipping. Of all the components which compose our watches, this seal is not the hardest to manufacture but it is wholly our own and its value is immense. Because it carries the promise of our unwavering commitment.

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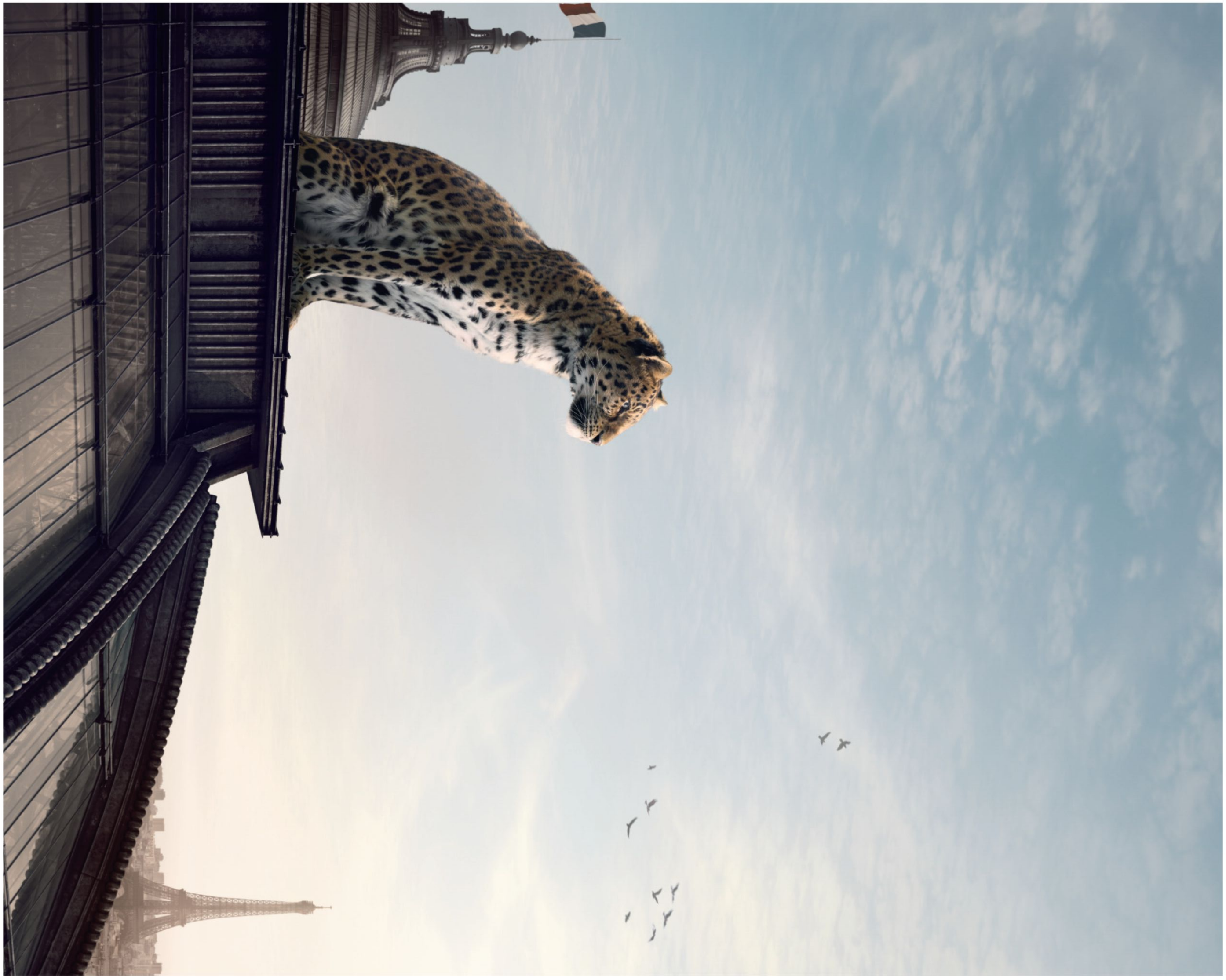

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Since its appearance almost 40 years ago, IWC's perpetual calendar has set the bar for efficiency and user-friendliness. All its displays are perfectly synchronised and can be conveniently advanced via the crown. What's more, we've calculated the moon phase so precisely that it will only deviate by one day in 577.5 years. In the new Portugieser Perpetual Calendar 44, we've packaged the ingenious complication in a case with a slimmer ring and box-shaped sapphire lenses that make it even lighter and more elegant. That being said, now it's your turn to keep looking good for the next centuries.

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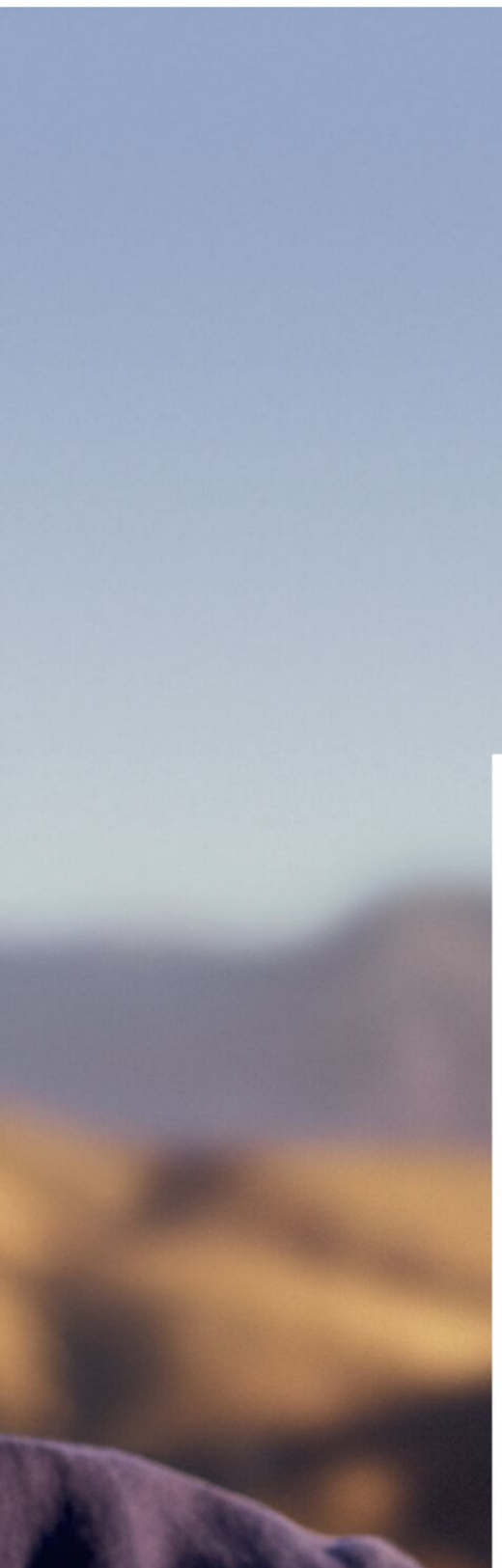
"THERE IS A BEAUTY THAT REMAINS WITH US AFTER WE'VE STOPPED LOOKING."

CORY RICHARDS,
PHOTOGRAPHER AND EXPLORER, WEARS THE
VACHERON CONSTANTIN OVERSEAS.



VACHERON CONSTANTIN
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PIAGET POLO WATCHES

Sascha Von Bismarck with Ella Richards, Orson Richards and Kesewa Aboah by Brigitte Niedermair.

PIAGET

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MONTBLANC

Season's Greetings from the Mont Blanc.
Rupert Friend and the Extreme 3.0 Collection.

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GQ WATCHES

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On the cover, from left: **Slawn's own Patek Philippe Aquanaut and Rolex Datejust.**

Photograph by **James Pearson-Howes**
Styling by **Itunu Oke**

PHOTOGRAPHS, MILLIE FELDER, MAASERHIT HONDA, KIRAN MANE, JAMES PEARSON-HOWES, TAMSIN TOPOLSKI. GROOMING, NAT BURY.

IN THE TEN YEARS THAT I'VE proclaimed to know anything at all about horology (please don't test me on Patek reference numbers – I'm not there yet), never have watches been so *everywhere* as they have in 2024. And I'm pretty sure it's not just my algorithm pigeonholing me as a watch guy, either.

Popular culture is the culprit, with shows such as Guy Ritchie's *The Gentlemen* and the emotionally draining hit that is *The Bear* leading the charge. Both use their characters' watch choices to determine plot lines and demonstrate the various different levels one can be into watches – from six-figure showoffs to chuck-me-an-affordable-Tissot-for-starters.

In the summer of sport, no Olympic medal ceremony, Euro 2024 match, F1 race, or Wimbledon tennis set went by without a timepiece lighting up the chat – viral shooter guy Yusuf Dikeç, Carlos Alcaraz, Lewis Hamilton, and the ice-cold Rolex Daytona worn by Cole Palmer were my favourites.

These days, hardly a day passes without another titan of their respective industries being spotted wearing their latest grail: A$AP Rocky, Brad Pitt, Mark Zuckerberg. (Made more mad given the fact the latter's wrists, like his fellow tech bros', have been bare AF until very recently.

This is to say that watches – and information about them – are more readily accessible now. As Slawn explains in our cover story, there's no single set of rules any more, which makes things all the more appealing (although we have created a set for you to abide by at your leisure, just in case).

Mike Christensen
LIFESTYLE DIRECTOR AND EDITOR, GQ WATCHES

CONTRIBUTORS

This issue's creators reveal moments that sparked their interest in watches.

CHARLIE TEASDALE
The writer and lover of charmingly inexpensive watches wrote "Point of Sale" p62
"My dad bought me a vintage dress watch for my 18th birthday – manual-wound, gold case, small seconds at 6pm – and it was not just a lovely thing with great sentimental value, but it served as a token of arrival into adulthood. To this day, I wear it as often as I can."

RACHEL FELDER
The Universal Genève-obsessed journalist wrote "London's Crown Jeweller" p72
"I've been fixated on watches since childhood, but recently, my appreciation of vintage has intensified. One afternoon, rummaging through my mum's closet, I found a shoebox with my grandfather's 1969 gold automatic Universal Genève wristwatch tucked inside. It's a tangible link to family, tradition, and heritage."

JAMES PEARSON-HOWES
The photographer behind an upcoming book of grime images shot Slawn for this issue's cover story p56
"I fell in love with my mate's bi-colour Rolex Datejust and have been searching for the perfect one ever since. I've been to Trotters Jewellers in East London at least a dozen times, but usually bottle it and go for a fry-up nearby instead. One day I'll skip the breakfast and get the watch!"

VIVIAN MORELLI
The Tokyo-based writer who fell into the world of watches by happy accident compiled this year's "Encyclopaedia of Watches" p76
"A few years ago, the owner of my local watch shop told me he'd been servicing a rare North Korean model, and asked if I wanted to meet its owner. This moment sums up my whole experience with watches: geeky shared interests, and always discovering something unexpected."

TIME CHANGES PACE

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DOWN TO THE LAST DETAIL

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THE HYPE LIST

THE APPLE WATCH GETS A GLOW-UP

By **Robert Leedham**

APPLE ISN'T A BIG FAN OF anniversaries. "Steve said, if you do something great, you don't spend a lot of time looking back," explains Eric Charles, Apple's product marketing lead for watches. For the tenth anniversary of its 100-million-plus-selling smartwatch, though, an exception is being made to Jobs' rule.

The Series 10 edition is the most substantial redesign since inception, with its biggest-ever display, a slimline profile, and a new titanium case option polished to →→

Apple Watch Series 10 £399.

PHOTOGRAPH, ALEX BIBBY. SET DESIGN, ALFIE DI TROLIO.

Everything that's been going down in the world of horology lately.

a pearlescent sheen. A decade in the making, it is testament to the OG's legacy, which, among other things, involves it becoming OK to wear two watches at the same time. "It's interesting to us because we love traditional analogue watches and most of us own them as well," says Molly Anderson, the brand's vice president of material design.

"If you don't want to take your Apple Watch off, that's probably not the worst thing," adds Alan Dye, vice president of human interface design at Apple, who worked alongside Jony Ive as the Watch first took shape.

Regardless of whether you pair yours with a Patek Philippe or wear it solo like Ryan Reynolds, customisation is key to the Watch's longevity. "I love seeing people walk the red carpet with it," says Dye, thinking of Nick Jonas and Jennifer Aniston.

Classic horology has had a profound impact on the Series 10. Its new Reflections face is modelled on hand-carved guilloché dials and uses the Watch's inbuilt gyroscope, sensors, and updated display to shimmer along with the sunlight. And for the first time it'll also display a ticking seconds hand when the watch isn't in use.

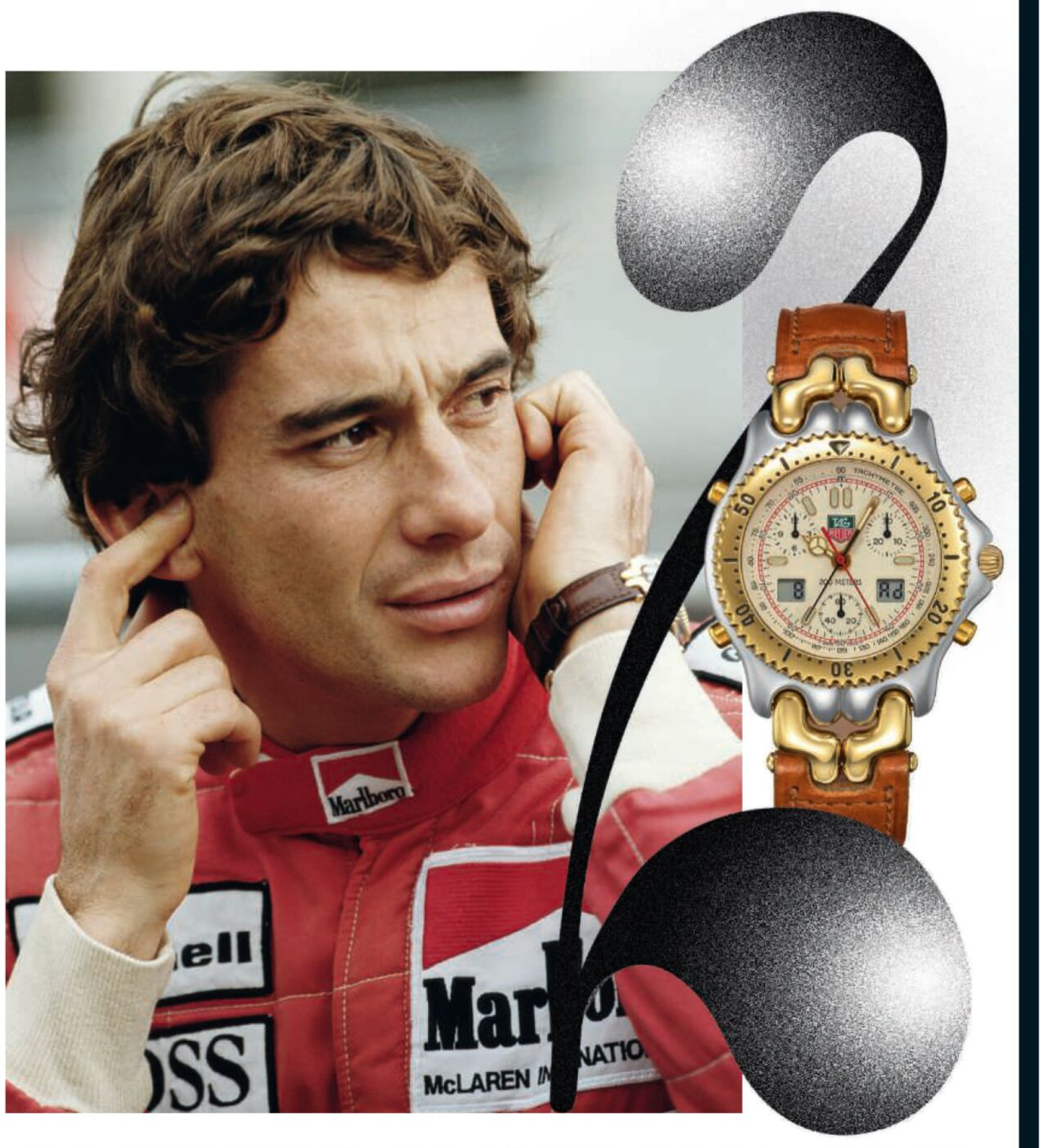
Given Apple's thirst for constant change, it's notable how much of the original Watch remains today. The rectangular form factors, soft corners, and lozenge section are all still in place, while the San Francisco typeface that was originally designed for Watch is now used in every Apple product.

"We have this obsession about trying to reflect our love for materiality and traditional horology, and so the romance in it is the idea that it's a single piece of metal," says Anderson. Even some of the Watch's wild initial concepts – such as the 18-carat gold model worn by Beyoncé – continue to inform its make-up through the refreshed links bracelet and a new titanium colourway.

Many of these details were directly inspired by the brand's collaboration with Hermès, which delights in introducing a little anarchy to the Watch – be it through the apple it added to 2022's winking Lucky Horse face, or an asymmetrical strap that was made to emulate stirrups. "You'd never put those proportions together," says Anderson. "It's surprising how much they care about whimsy and joy."

For all that's stayed the same, Apple promises plenty more to come from the Watch in its second decade. "We're always exploring, always challenging ourselves," says Dye. "And we're not afraid of the new."

"Given Apple's thirst for change, it's notable how much of the original Watch remains today."



AYRTON SENNA'S LEGACY LIVES ON

By **Vivian Morelli**

WITH A SKELETON DIAL FEATURING a tourbillon, an iconic 'S' in bold yellow, and a tachymeter scale reaching up to 400kph, it's safe to say Tag Heuer's new Carrera Chrono Tourbillon captures the ballsiness of Ayrton Senna, the legendary Brazilian Formula 1 driver.

Even in this *Drive To Survive* era, with its young guns and next-gen rivalries, Senna's exploits loom large in racing lore, so this watch marking 30 years since his tragic passing – and the release of a new Netflix series about his life, *Senna* – serves a timely dose of nostalgia with souped-up mod cons.

"When I'm in any airports around the world and pass through a Tag Heuer store, there's always this beautiful picture of [Senna] wearing his watch," says Brazilian actor Gabriel Leone, who portrays the sporting icon in the show. "Thirty years after his death, you still have him there as a huge, worldwide icon and historical figure. That's amazing."

Playing Senna isn't Leone's first foray into fast cars, having starred in last year's *Ferrari*. "I didn't do much driving for *Senna*, but in terms of acting it was another level of immersing myself for almost a year," he says. "Playing one of our biggest heroes is an honour, and a huge responsibility for me." The ability to capture the aura of someone so great was the toughest part. "More important than anything was to find his essence. I started watching him, focusing on his eyes. His eyes were so unique, so truthful and emotional. That's when I started to understand him more," Leone says.

In the series, Leone rocks two Tag watches Senna became famous for wearing: a vintage 35mm chronograph from around 1955 made of solid gold and outfitted with a black leather strap, and a S/EL classic model with strap of buttery brown leather. Fitting, given that time itself also plays an essential role in the show. "We're talking about a guy that lived intensely through 30 years and unfortunately died so young," says Leone. "So time is this really important concept for us."

Clockwise from top: Ayrton Senna; his 1988 Tag Heuer S/EL S25706C; Gabriel Leone plays the late racing driver in new Netflix series *Senna*.

PHOTOGRAPHS, GETTY IMAGES, NETFLIX.

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A Racing Machine On The Wrist

3 REGÉ-JEAN PAGE IS FIVE MINUTES AHEAD

By **Mike Christensen**

WHEN ACTOR REGÉ-JEAN PAGE WAS a kid, he wanted to learn to tell the time so badly, "so I could set my own bedtime", jokes the *Bridgerton* breakout, next seen in Steven Soderbergh thriller *Black Bag*. "Suddenly, when you have a watch, you are responsible for your own time. You can see how people carry their watches, they represent something of status, too."

Here are five watch-wearing tips from the most sharp of Longines ambassadors.

1. GET A FIVE-MINUTE HEAD START
"I use my watches to tell the time first and foremost, and always set them five minutes fast."

2. GO SOLO
"It's a bit like jazz. You have to learn your scales before you break them. Likewise, you learn where watches fit, then you can undermine that quite deliberately. That's where you start having fun."

3. LAST THING ON
"Most often, it'll be the finishing touch. An outfit will come together, the vibe of the day will be set, then you find the watch that complements or reinforces that best."

4. SEEK OUT EXPERTS
"Don't buy a watch because everyone else is wearing it. For your first watch, take someone who knows what they're talking about and get something that makes you feel good."

5. WEAR IT WITH PRIDE
"Making choices about how you want to express yourself accurately and artfully has become rather important to me, and watches play into that."

Regé-Jean Page at the 2024 Vanity Fair Oscar Party.

RM 65-01 McLaren W1
Price upon request.

LANDO NORRIS' NEW CRUSH

When you're a hotshot F1 driver, perks must come at you faster than their cars flat out down a home straight. For McLaren lads Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri in particular, few things could possibly beat having the pick of the bunch from the horological sweet shop that is Richard Mille. Its fourth McLaren collaboration, the 65-01 McLaren W1 is RM's new kid on the block, and with a bezel fittingly shaped like the new McLaren supercar, it might just be the best. As a split-second chronograph, it's as functional as it is highly covetable. "Lando's always interested in what new watches we have coming out," RM's CMO Tim Malachard said at the launch. "He is very passionate about the brand so I'm sure we'll be getting a call from him wanting to wear this in the future." MC

5 AP DROPS A BERLIN TECHNO BEAT

From chiming watches, 2001's now-iconic Jay-Z hook-up, and being aligned to the Montreux Jazz Festival, music has always been a part of Audemars Piguet's cultural dialogue. And 2024 saw the house go hard for... house.

The Keinemusik x AP project was conceived at Miami Art Basel in 2022. "We had a good vibe," says Berlin-based Rampa, who has produced for Burna Boy and Drake.

For Rampa, the connection is twofold: AP's HQ Le Brassus reminds him of where he grew up – "the silence, the nature, you can focus". Then there's the craft – "engineering and detail".

"We are not that underground any more, and it feels fine because that's the evolution, that's the journey," Rampa says. "At some point, you meet people on the way and go wherever it leads you."

This year, both Travis Scott and John Mayer created APs of their own – so when is Rampa's dropping? "I've thought about it," he teases. "Let's see. It's not up to me now but the ideas are ready." Just know that when it drops, they'll be harder to cop than entry into Berghain. MC

Right: Rampa, Adam Port and &ME at 2024's Keinemusik X AP event.

PHOTOGRAPHS, AUDEMARS PIGUET, GETTY IMAGES.

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REVERSO

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YOUTUBE IS WATCH CONTENT KING

By **Josiah Gogarty**

NICO LEONARD IS ONE OF THE MANY reasons YouTube has become the natural home of watch enthusiasts. Though he originally started his channel as a promotional tool for his Belfast shop, Pride & Pinion, while it was shuttered during Covid, today Leonard's 1.8 million subscribers come to hear him rinse the watch collections of celebrities and Tiktokers.

"It's not a persona; that's how I am in real life," he says of his zany online presence, where he delivers thundering judgements in a half-Dutch, half-Northern Irish accent. He already has his retirement video planned: an examination of John Mayer's collection, with Mayer sitting beside him.

Another pundit who offers no-nonsense reviews and industry takes is Jenni Elle. When she started her channel in 2020 "it was very special to be female" in the online watch world, Elle says. "Now this is not really much of a focus any more, which I think is [better]." She's done videos exploring the lack of female watch hobbyists, but takes a gender-neutral approach to reviews, preferring to ask simply: "Is your wrist large enough or small enough to pull it off?"

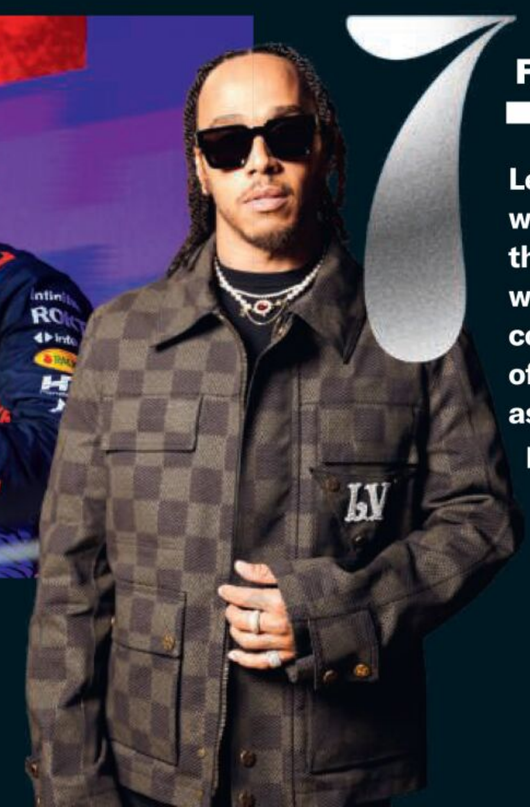
Other YouTubers stay behind the camera, like Kai Schmitz, who uploads videos of painstaking watch repairs to his channel, Red Dead Restoration. Because his English-language skills are "solid but not exceptional", he decided to forgo voice commentary – and that led him unwittingly into the world of ASMR. "When my viewers pointed this out, I had to look up what ASMR actually meant," he says. Now he uses special microphones to record the clicks, snaps, and pops of his process.

On Wristwatch Revival, Marshall Sutcliffe does do commentary, often about the backstory of watches viewers send him for repair. One such viewers was LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy, who contributed his dad's '50s Rolex Oyster Perpetual. Murphy retrieved it when he was in Sutcliffe's home city of Seattle for a concert. "James comes out to do the show and he's wearing the thing," says Sutcliffe, whose nerves about the Rolex's delicacy weren't helped when Murphy started vigorously banging a drum with his watch hand. Thankfully, the watch got through the gig unscathed; and the resulting video earned Sutcliffe enough viewers (750,000 and counting) to fill a stadium of his own.

From top: YouTuber Nico Leonard; LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy rocking his father's Rolex; vlogger Jenni Elle.

Nico Leonard has his retirement video planned out: an examination of John Mayer's collection, with Mayer beside him.

PHOTOGRAPHS, GETTY IMAGES, RED DEAD RESTORATION, WRISTWATCH REVIVAL.



7 F1 HAS A NEW TIMEKEEPER

Lewis Hamilton taking his catwalk-worthy fits to the Ferrari pit lane isn't the only big change to get used to when the 2025 Formula One season comes calling. It's all change in the official timekeeping stakes too, as LVMH has sealed a 10-year partnership with the sport. "The seasons that await us promise to be extraordinary," says Frédéric Arnault, who heads up LVMH Watches, and has been close to F1 thanks to Tag Heuer's relationship with Red Bull's Max Verstappen. So it's goodbye to the green and yellow Rolex hoardings that have decorated tracks around the world since 2013, likely to be replaced by images of Moët Champagne, Tag logos, and more LV monograms than your favourite tote. MC

From left: Red Bull's Max Verstappen and new Ferrari racer Louis Hamilton.

A NEW FIRST: THE 140TH ANNIVERSARY LIMITED EDITIONS

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BREITLING
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140 YEARS OF FIRSTS

THE MB&F SUCCESSION PLAN

By **Mike Christensen**

MAX BÜSSER IS RESPONSIBLE for some of this century's most wild and creative watches. In August, six months before his beloved independent MB&F turns 20, Büsser announced that Chanel would be buying a share of the brand. We caught up with him at Watches of Switzerland's flagship store in London to discuss anniversaries, the future and celebrities – here are seven takeaways.

1. MB&F Keeps It Exclusive
"Anybody who wants to order a watch, we say thank you, but there is an interview process. It's not about how many watches you have, or how many you want to buy. Tell me about your story. Who are you, and how did you get into the watch world?"

2. Celebrate in Style
"We're pumping up on vitamins to get ready [for our 20th anniversary] because it is going to be insane. Most brands, when they mark an anniversary, it's about them. But it shouldn't be; it's about giving back."

3. There Isn't Enough Crazy Creativity
"We need to feed the cow and not just milk it. There are youngsters relaunching super crazy watches from the '70s, like Amida recently. In 1976, Amida was [seen as] revolutionary, though, so I would love these guys to take that as a stepping stone, then do their own revolution."

Left: Max Büsser's business is rooted in values and realness.

4. A Creator's Job Is To Consistently Pivot
"Midjourney or ChatGPT can only create something if I created it first. So creating a new category [or] a disruptive idea cannot be done by those systems because they basically iterate on something existing."

5. Shy Away From Celebrities
"[Celebrity endorsement] could have helped the brand in tough years, but it would be fake and we don't do fake. We will never give somebody anything, we never pay anybody to wear what we do, and we'll never give you a discount."

6. Value Values Over Profit
"A publicly owned group cannot own MB&F because their intent and incentives would all be about growth and profit. A private equity [firm] would be ten times worse, and some gazillionaire would be even worse than that. We needed a private company with incredible values, which is very philanthropic."

7. Under-Promise and Over-Deliver
"I gave [Chanel] our business plan and said, '2024, 2025, 2026, 2027: flat. Same revenue as 2023. Profit, every year less.' It was not a manoeuvre. I was like, 'Knowing us, we'll do better than that, but if you want numbers, these are the numbers I'm giving you.' The response was one of reassurance. Transparency works well."

TAG HEUER'S NEW AQUARACER GOES WITH THE TIDE

Titanium is the watch world's material *du jour*. Omega Seamasters, Rolex Yacht-Masters, Cartier Crashes, you name it – all the big brands are making lighter and more robust versions of their top timepieces.

Few are as affordable as Tag Heuer's collab with Australian watch authority Time+Tide – or as rose-tinted. Nicknamed the Sundowner thanks to its unique sheen resembling a Bondi sunset, this limited-edition Aquaracer Solargraph gets two shields of honour on the dial. On that khaki strap, it is destined for adventure. MC

Tag Heuer Aquaracer Solargraph £2,700.

Rapper Central Cee, seen here wearing a G-Shock (again).

CENTRAL CEE IS IN A RELATIONSHIP

When Central Cee was playing Nintendo with Sabrina Carpenter frow at Pharrell's LV Men's SS25 show, he was wearing a G-Shock DW-6900. In his "Moi" video (feat Raye), his watch of choice is a trusty G-Shock. On his new *GQ* cover... you already know what we're gonna say. The 26-year-old rapper has been wearing G-Shocks since he was a kid kicking round West London – so making his relationship official as a European ambassador "just made sense", he says. "It relates." (Cench: a man of choice words.) We're gassed for what comes next. OLLIE COX

PHOTOGRAPH, G-SHOCK.

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Clockwise from left: **Breitling Premier B19 Datora 42, Super Chronomat B19 44 Perpetual Calendar, Navitimer B19 Chronograph 43 Perpetual Calendar** All £48,000 each.

BREITLING JUST ENTERED THE PERPETUAL CALENDAR GAME

By **Mike Christensen**

"PERPETUAL CALENDARS SELL," SAYS GEORGES KERN, Breitling CEO. "It's as simple as that." The Swiss watchmaker's decision to celebrate 140 years of making watches with its first perpetual calendar chronograph movements requires no further explanation, then.

There's a trio of new pieces – a 42mm Premier, a 43mm Navitimer and a 44mm Chronomat – each made of 18-carat red gold with a B19 calibre movement inside that promises to blast out four full days of power reserve.

"The Premier was the first watch by Willy Breitling where he moved from instrument to style. The Navitimer is probably the most famous pilot's watch. And the Chronomat is now our second-largest line – it's super recognisable and saved Breitling in the '80s after the quartz crisis," says Kern.

With only 140 of each available, these watches are for "people who are totally in love with Breitling", Kern says. "When you grow like we have, you become hot, you become fashionable... So what we're doing now is more of the same – in search of excellence, sophistication, and building awareness of the new Breitling," Kern adds. " We took over the palace, and the castle, and the presidential suite, but now we need to consolidate the business." It's enough to make you excited for what the next decade will bring.

A DOG IN THE INDIE FIGHT

"How can I make a watch that I appreciate as a watch nerd, but doesn't take itself too seriously?" Richard Benc (*right*) pondered this question during the pandemic lockdowns, between attempts to improve his kill/death ratio on *Call of Duty*. Four years later, Benc runs Studio Underd0g, one of the most disruptive, in-demand watch brands in the market.

It started with watermelon. "It was not a commercial idea," Benc jokes about the 01, a hand-wound chronograph with '60s-inspired case and fruity dial. "If I had said, 'I want to do a watermelon-themed column-wheel chrono,' who would have gone, 'Yeah, we're on to something here'?" And yet, it worked. The 01 series launched via crowdfunding in early 2021. The target was £20,000; instead it raised £90,000 and Benc ended up making 300 watches.

Unorthodoxy quickly became the MO for SU. Its watches don't simply launch and stay on sale; they're available in nine-hour drop windows. It's first come, first served. No queues, no bots. But you'll have to wait for it to be made, which can take a few months.

"We've been able to leverage the fact that the Swiss watch industry has made [long delivery times] the norm," says Benc, "but also set the bar really low: you place yourself on a waitlist and there is zero communication – you don't know when you're getting your watch."

'Doing the other thing' is the driving force of the brand. The luxury Swiss watch industry is shiny and glamorous, but also secretive, and Benc wants Studio Underd0g to be transparent and inclusive. The brand is extremely open about where and how its watches are made, and at the end of a round of sales, SU publishes its figures for all to see.

Benc doesn't take any shit, either. Some of the 5,930 orders from the March drop were actually cancelled because buyers had already listed them on reselling sites before even taking delivery. And earlier this year, SU launched a watch that paid 'homage' to a Chinese copy of its 01 Watermel0n.

As the brand grows, Benc hopes to stick to the same playbook. "So far I've had no experience of it backfiring, so I don't understand why that wouldn't work for a larger brand, but I know that will be the hesitation... Some of the strategies would be considered high risk." CHARLIE TEASDALE

Left: **Underd0g Watermel0n Gen 2** £500.

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WHY MILANO WATCH WEEK SLAPS

By **Scarlett Baker**

Above, from left: Debut Milano Watch Week mavens Kevin Gaiffe of Reuge and Guido Terreni of Parmigiani Fleurier.

With a horological calendar that's already rammed full with the likes of Watches and Wonders, Geneva Watch Days, and Dubai Watch Week, surely the last thing the world needs is another watch fair?

Fabrizio Bonvicino, co-founder of the watch authority Italian Watch Spotter, disagrees. "The industry has always been rather elitarian and closed to outsiders," says the 25-year-old. "But we're experiencing a cultural switch, so values have to adapt by being more open to new ideas."

Cue the low-key but chic 2024 birth of Milano Watch Week, or MWW.

"We have purists, we have mono-brand collectors, but we also have people who base their decision on how [watches] fit to their style. It doesn't always have to be about technicality and complications," says Bonvicino. It is these younger, more style-aligned watch enthusiasts that Bonvicino wants MWW to cater for. He wants to welcome collectors to see watches, try them on, and create a connection with the watchmakers and those behind the brands. "I live for that dopamine rush when I see a watch I've never seen before," he adds.

The fair was staged on the rooftop of Milan's iconic roof terrace, Terrazza Martini, in early October. There were 20 esteemed brands on board for its first year (by comparison, Watches and Wonders had 54 this year), all in favour of a more laid-back affair that enabled them to open up their new releases to anyone slightly captivated by watches.

"I live for that dopamine rush when I see a watch I've never seen before."

Edouard Meylan, CEO of H Moser & Cie, feels MWW "reflects a growing demand for more intimate, boutique experiences", a shift that "underscores a move away purely from brand recognition towards a more meaningful exploration".

Benoît Mintiens, founder of Ressence, loves that the show has the feel of going into friendly territory – "like a sporting event, where you know all the people present share your enthusiasm for mechanical watches", he says.

And for the CEO of Parmigiani Fleurier, Guido Terreni, the appeal lies in what so many Italians are known for: their style. "Sharing my passion for watchmaking with Italian clients is something that I am really excited for, because they consistently set the pace for elegance."

DON'T JUST BUY A WATCH – JOIN THE CLUB

If the club is kicking off, you wanna be in the mix, right? The same goes for watch brands. Die-hard Panerai fans – Paneristis – are some of the most notable enthusiasts, with a community of well over 30,000, including stars like Sylvester Stallone and Dwayne Johnson (*right*). Paneristi started in the late 1990s and was officially formed in 2000. "Several years later, the German 'Ristis had a get-together known as a P-Day," says Paul Richardson from Panerai Passione, "which became an annual gathering of Paneristis across the globe. It's the most well-known and close-knit watch community." And now they're getting their own watch to celebrate 25 years of the community. Out next September, the Panerai Luminor Venticinque will be limited to 1,000 pieces. VM

Right: Panerai Luminor Venticinque PAM02025.

PHOTOGRAPHS, MAXIMUM FILM/ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES, MILAN WATCH WEEK.

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ROLEX'S QUEST TO CONSERVE AND PROTECT

By **Vivian Morelli**

Rolex Enterprise Laureate Inza Koné and his team protect and study the endangered primates of Ivory Coast.

AS WELL AS BEING THE CROWN, THE captain, the top dog of watches, Rolex is also very good at recognising trailblazers who make a significant contribution worldwide to improving life and protecting our planet. People such as Ivorian Inza Koné, who has dedicated his life to the study and protection of primates.

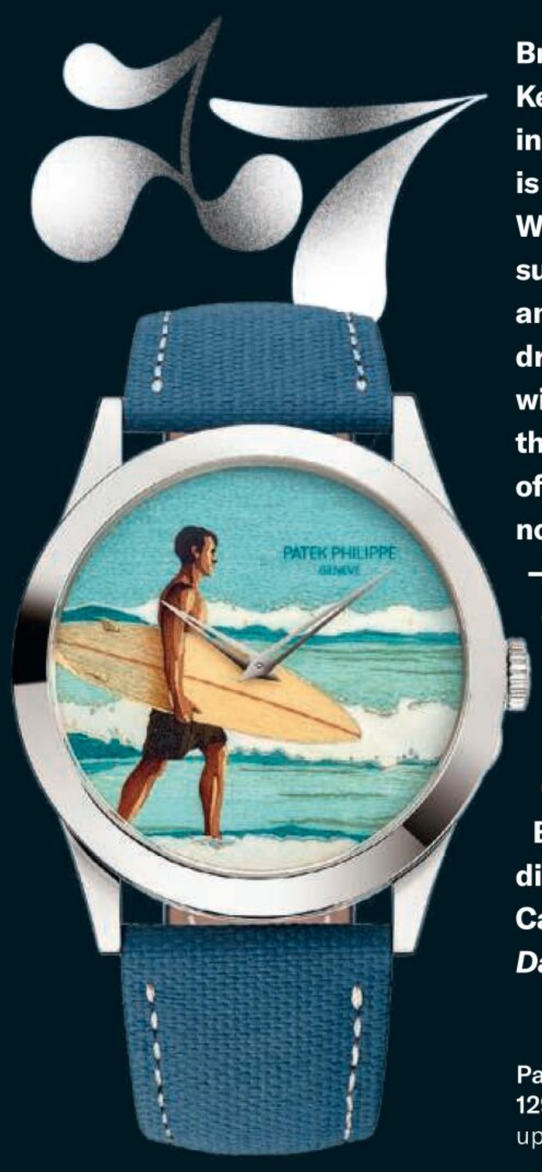
It started when he was eight and formed a friendship with Kouassi, a young baboon. "Unfortunately, as he grew up, he became aggressive, even towards me. We had to put him down," says Koné. The distress prompted him to swat up on monkey behaviour so he could advocate for them. In turn, this led to him becoming the first primatologist on the Ivory Coast as well as one of Rolex's Enterprise Laureates – specifically for his work in the richly biodiverse Tanoé-Ehy forest in his native country.

"We're helping conserve four of the most endangered primate species in West Africa," he says, including Miss Waldron's red colobus, which has not been scientifically documented since 1978. "The approach we're using is to make local communities responsible for conserving their natural heritage." For this project, Koné brought together 11 villages surrounding the forest to safeguard its endangered fauna and to deter threats such as poaching, logging, and agricultural land-clearing.

Winning the Rolex Award for Enterprise helped Koné scale up the programme's operations, increase support for local farmers and further raise local awareness of marsh and forest conservation.

"People understand Tanoé-Ehy is the last massif where people still have the chance to see certain wild animals,' he says. "There's a sense of pride, and conservation issues are well understood. We have a strong commitment from the communities."

SURFBOARD. SURFBOARD. SURFBOARD.



Breitling and surfing god Kelly Slater have been making watches for years. Tudor is a gnarly supporter of the WSL Big Wave. Tag Heuer has surfer Kai Lenny on its books, and in the past Bremont has dropped a few dive watches with Laird Hamilton. Clearly the watch industry has a bit of a thing for the lifestyle. But no single watch – or collab – embodies the true ethos of surfing culture quite like this Patek Philippe Calatrava from its 2024 Rare Handcrafts collection. Called 'Morning on the Beach', with a surfer on the dial about to hit the waves in California, it has *Barbarian Days* vibes, and then some.

Patek Philippe Reference 5089G-129 "Morning on the Beach" Price upon request.

Clockwise from top: Bucherer's L'Epée Time Machine; Tiffany & Co's Taxi Clock; Mondaine's Magnet Clock.

DON'T STOP ALL THE CLOCKS

Clocks just reached their comeback era, FYI. For anyone looking to make mad horological sci-fi their new personality, look to Tiffany & Co's Taxi Clock (£52,000) – no guesses what it's inspired by – Mondaine's super clean Magnet Clock (£199), or something batshit in between, such as the Bucherer L'Epée Time Machine (£30,759). Should that be you, some words of advice from Olivier Gantenbein, Bucherer's global associate director of haute horlogerie: "Every rotating device also needs a locking system: and this one has been designed as a wing-nut that's turned to block the rotation. It makes the owner the key player in its usage." Simple stuff, right? OC

PHOTOGRAPHS, ROLEX/NYANI QUARMYNE.

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Be it *Argo*'s out-of-time Rolex or *Crazy Rich Asians*' genuine six-figure piece, getting it right on the wrist matters in film and television – and mistakes will *always* be noticed.

PHOTOGRAPHS, ALAMY, DISNEY+, HBO, NETFLIX, SHUTTERSTOCK, WARNER.

SECRETS OF THE MOVIE WATCH HUNTERS

Expensive watches on screen are nothing new, but with an army of online horology sleuths now tracking down every piece – and inaccuracy – in record time, Hollywood's costume designers are turning to the experts.

By **Finlay Renwick**

1

FOR WATCH EXPERT ERIC WIND, SITTING DOWN TO enjoy a film or TV show can offer up unexpected distractions. Like the time he noticed Ben Affleck wearing a 2000s Rolex Sea-Dweller Deepsea in *Argo*, a film based on events from the late '70s. "It was so obvious," he says over the phone from New York. "It was about three times the thickness of a Rolex from that period."

Or in 2008's *The Bank Job*, a less Oscar-worthy film, where Wind clocked Jason Statham with a post-millennial Tag Monaco, despite it being set in 1971. He also picked up on continuity errors in *Succession*, with Sarah Snook rocking different Cartiers from one scene to the next, and heard a story about the crew losing an ultra rare gold Tag on the set of *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

"It can be like nails on a chalkboard if you know your watches," says Wind. "Most films use fakes to avoid the insurance costs, but [increasingly more] people want the genuine article."

Production companies now hire and consult with people like Wind. Previously a VP senior specialist for Christie's auction house, he now runs a booming vintage business from his base in Florida. One of his biggest wins was sourcing an original 'Paul Newman' Rolex Daytona for 2018's *Crazy Rich Asians*. "People thought it was a fake," says Wind, "because how could a real Paul Newman worth $500,000 have ended up in this brief little scene? I was proud of that one."

Brands such as Cartier have seen the benefits of loosening up and working alongside a production. "I know they supplied watches for *Succession*," says Wind, "because I was hoping to be involved, but brands are savvy now. They see the opportunity."

Alongside noted dealers and experts, most productions work with a dedicated prop master whose job involves sourcing essential background items. "One thing you might not think about," says Laura Roeper, prop master on *The Bear*, "is continuity. So obtaining the exact [same] Rolex after not filming for months is a challenge. A lot of watches are rentals and you just hope you can find them in time!"

Christopher Storer, director of *The Bear*, is a noted clothing and watch enthusiast, who works closely with Roeper on nailing down the details of – for instance – Olivia Colman's Rolex Submariner or Will Poulter's Omega Seamaster. "We work with real chefs daily," says Roeper, "so seeing what they are wearing is a big part of how I choose the watches."

Lynda Reiss, a prop master who has worked on shows including *Stranger Things* and *True Detective*, says the hardest thing is sourcing more than one of the same watch, especially when factoring in stunt and photo doubles who often do driving and hand inserts – AKA primetime wristshot moments.

"Once I've done a character breakdown," says Reiss (who notes that David Harbour's vintage Casio in *Stranger Things* is her favourite on-screen piece), "then I know which direction I want to go in. I find watches that will work for that brief. These are presented to the actor and they generally make the final choice. But I do usually gently push my first choice."

For a highly specific brief, a costume designer might seek out someone like Daniel Somlo, a London-based authority with his own Burlington Arcade store to back it up. "We have a good relationship with Oscar-winning costume designer Janty Yates," Somlo tells me. "She is Ridley Scott's costume designer and regularly contacts us for watches to use in productions and advice." Somlo has, to name just a few, sourced an Omega Constellation for Michael Fassbender and a Cartier Mini Tank for Penélope Cruz. "Mark Wahlberg wore my personal Rolex 1680 Submariner in *All the Money in the World*."

Authenticity is not just about nailing the look, either. "We have a lot of knowledge about how watches were worn and their purpose," adds Somlo. It begs the question: are we close to someone winning the Oscar for Best Costume Design for timepieces alone?

Surely it's only a matter of time. ●

FINLAY RENWICK IS THE EDITOR OF *DRAKE'S DIARY*.

1. Ben Affleck's modern Rolex Sea-Dweller in '70s-set *Argo*.
2. Mark Wahlberg wears Daniel Somlo's Submariner in *All the Money in the World*.
3. David Harbour's vintage Casio in *Stranger Things*.
4. Will Poulter sports a Seamaster on *The Bear*. **5.** Jason Statham's too-new Tag Monaco on *The Bank Job*.
6. *Industry*'s Ken Leung with his character's Omega.

PHOTOGRAPHS, ALAMY, DISNEY+, HBO, NETFLIX, SHUTTERSTOCK.

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THE DOs & DON'Ts OF A WATCH

In this ever-mad world of wristwear, a new era of freedom (and tiny watches) is reshaping the culture of timepieces. To bring some order to our horological habits, Dimepiece's Brynn Wallner peers into the zeitgeist to find a fresh collection of commandments to embrace.

Never, Ever Fake It

This one goes out to the ladies. Wait, we're talking about watches? OK, everyone listen up. You may be surprised to hear that the market for fake watches today is worth billions of dollars, with an estimated 40 million a year sold to those trying to keep up with the Joneses. Investing in a watch is ultimately an investment in yourself – so what does it say about you if you invest in something that's fake – even if it's a really well done 'super-clone' undetectable to anyone without a loupe? If you can't afford that grail Patek Philippe, be a man and come to terms with that (or buy a lot of lottery tickets).

Illustrations by **Simon Bailly**

Getting Off? Leave It On

When things are getting hot, surely you're not concerned about taking off your wristwear? A little spicy spontaneity is important, so if things go down and you happen to be wearing your daily driver, the Rolex stays on. Are things different for a hardcore watch guy, though? Is it a turn-on to catch a glimpse of your newly acquired grail in the act? As Lawrence Schlossman, co-host of the religiously listened-to *Throwing Fits* podcast puts it: "If you're *pointedly* keeping your favourite timepiece on during the sacred act of beating cheeks, you're worried about the wrong face, hands, and movement, brother."

Timekeep That Keepsake

I hear a lot of "It was my grandpa's, so I love wearing it, but it stopped working and I haven't got round to servicing it." OK. Go get it serviced. Personally, I think it's casually dignified to have your watch keep the time. And it's a chance to not look at your screen. Anyone not keeping it set is bluntly admitting to wearing a watch for the vanity of it. If that's you, whatever, do you, but isn't it nice to actually use something for what it's designed for? As Adrian Douzmanian of vintage watch retailer Very Special says, "It takes two minutes at most to set your watch. Tighten up!"

Spark Up the Convo

Leaving the house in the TikTok era means you're prone to lines of inquiry that were previously considered deeply private. Still, "What's on your wrist?" has been asked long before social media and the happy truth is that most watch wearers are excited to talk about it. At a party, asking someone I don't know about their wrist candy is a great conversation starter. And, almost always I get enthusiastic stories about where they acquired it ("It was my mum's!"), why they love it ("I bought it for myself when I turned 30!"), and what they want next ("A Date just like yours!").

Don't Forget to Wash Under Your Lugs

Your watch will get cleaned during routine servicing. This is the standard – but there are exceptions. If I may: on a recent visit to Sotheby's, I took off my Cartier Tank Française to try on a forthcoming lot. To my horror, there were black smudges on my skin. Rich Lopez, senior VP of watches, kindly whisked my watch away to steam it using the in-house machinery. Due to the way the links are configured, my Tank had accumulated an embarrassing amount of grime that was rubbing off on my wrist. Life happens, so don't be shy to hit your local repair shop if she could use a bath.

Beware Entry-Level at Executive Level

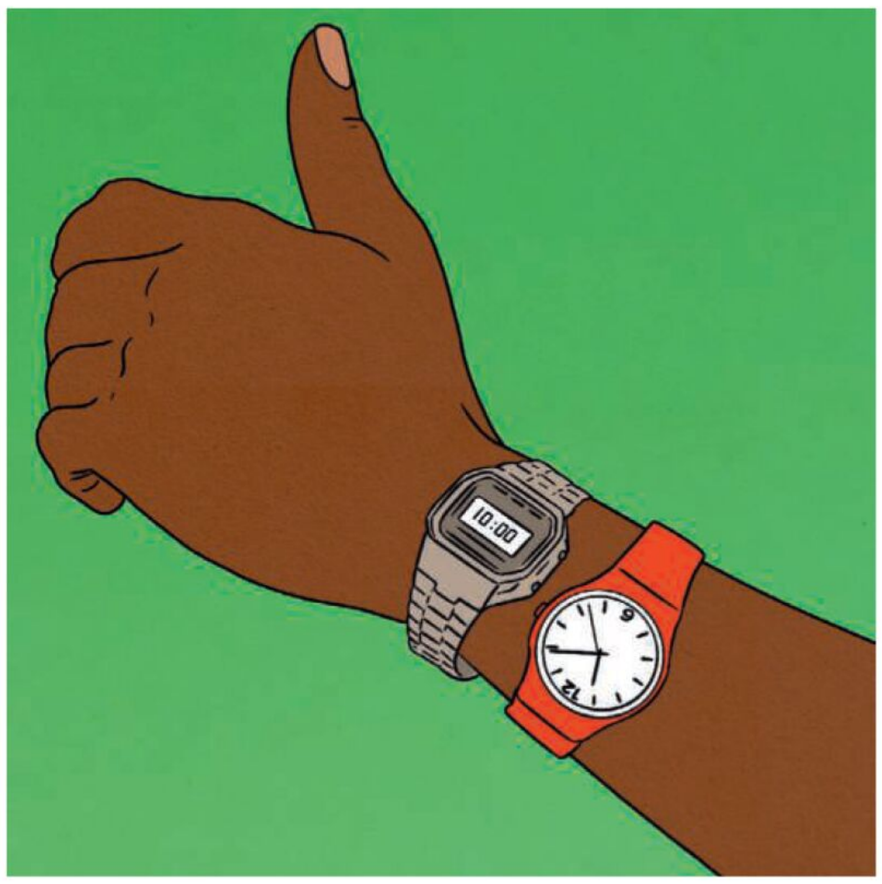
Within the context of certain workplaces, it's not uncommon to see a junior member of staff rocking a big-boy watch. But if you want to be taken seriously, isn't it best practice for an entry-level employee to lay low? *Industry* co-creator Mickey Down says, "If someone buys a Day-Date, and another person on the same salary buys a Patek, it's a little bit strange because they both know what they are, and what they do." On the flip side, Konrad Kay, the other *Industry* co-creator, notes the very deliberate thing established finance guys do: "Wear a fucking Garmin watch. Or even a Casio. It's its own flex, in a way."

WATCHES

Thomas Sabo

Size Is Everything

Earlier this year, NBA player Kyle Kuzma posted this on Instagram Stories: "If you're over 6'4", put the Cartier watches down – it's time lol." (He clarified a Cartier Crash is fine.) Is he right? "The watch should match the man," says Chris Black, my favourite men's fashion snob, *GQ* columnist, and co-host of the hit podcast *How Long Gone*. "A dainty little timepiece on a big vascular arm doesn't look good. Make sure you choose correctly," he adds. Exceptions exist (hi, Muhammad Ali and his Tiny Tank).



For Those About to Bling... Tread Wisely

If you're considering diamonds, sapphires, or rainbows, look in the mirror and ask: is this something I will actually wear? Or am I just getting a little trigger-happy because I saw how cool that vintage gem-set Patek looked on Bad Bunny at the Lakers game? There's a fine line between leaving your comfort zone in the name of fashion and going off the rails by buying into bling that never sees the light of day. Stay wise, kids.

Vintage Is a State of Mind

When is a watch capital-V vintage? The consensus is somewhere floating between 20 and 30 years old. Alan Bedwell, aka Foundwell, a purveyor of vintage watches and antiques, says a quarter century is the sweet spot. "It's hard to believe something from 2000 is vintage," he muses. "What does that make me? Fossilised?" The fact he can joke about this tells you all you need to know. "If you are overthinking what the threshold is for what constitutes a watch vintage, you're doing just that: overthinking."

Live a Little – Go Southpaw

The standard rule of thumb is: wear a watch on your non-dominant hand. But some collectors have imbued this choice with a sense of spirituality. Yoni Ben-Yehuda, head of watches at Material Good, is a righty and, challenging the rule, wears his watches on the right wrist. "When I was 16, after my stepfather passed away, my mom bought me my first real watch," he shares. "I put it on my right hand. Eventually I'd learn that's 'wrong', but I've kept it there, below a tattoo of my children. It's a reminder to put my kids first, even when it's not comfortable."

Take Two Steps to Two-Tone

Call me an American psycho, but there's something sexy about two-tone watches when styled right, à la Patrick Bateman's gold/steel Seiko with a finance guy suit. My dad got a similar watch when graduating law school, so maybe it's an '80s thing. Is it too gauche a flex? Douzmanian acknowledges it requires a little sauce to rock this style: "If you can't pull it off, that's on you, and more power to those that can."

Accessorise the Accessory

Mixing jewellery and watches, according to rapper Aurora Anthony, "is more of a vibe thing". He has some good tips, too. One: jewellery shouldn't be bigger than a watch. Two: any watch bigger than 40mm shouldn't be stacked at all. Anthony says it's like getting dressed: "Proportions are everything. If you have a cropped jacket, layering a larger hoodie under your jacket looks crazy." And what about mixing metals? "Yes, it is perfectly fine to do that."

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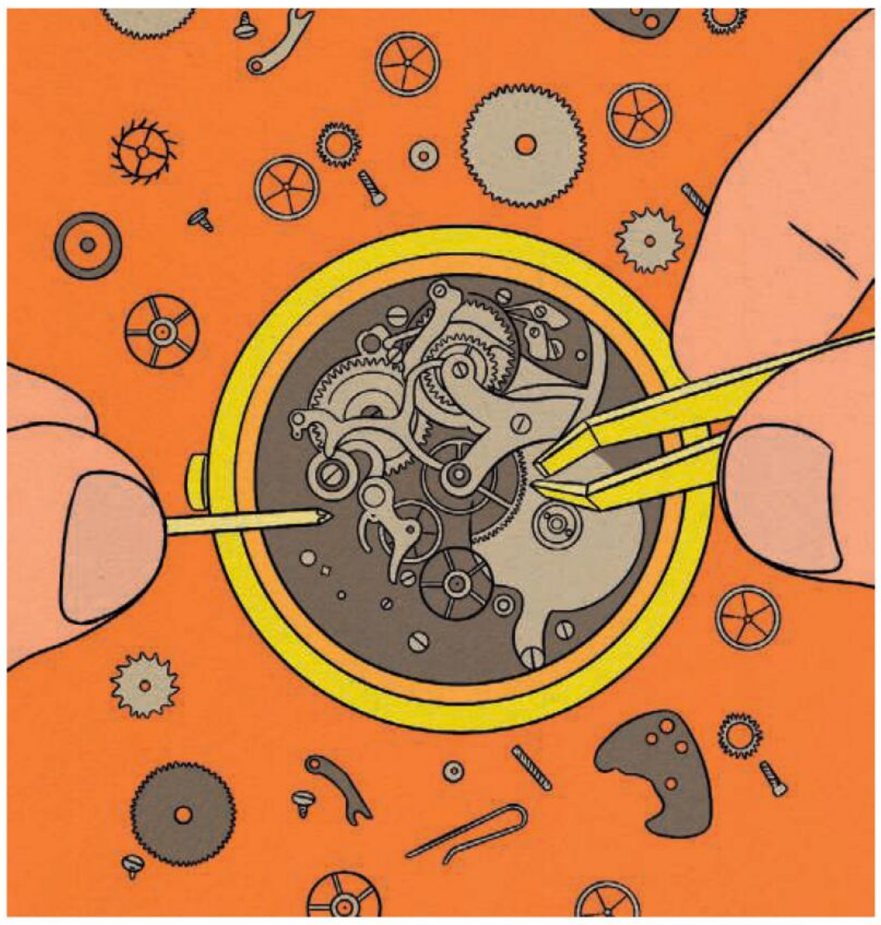

It’s Not as Complicated as It Sounds

This ain’t no Ikea chair! If your watch has a complication (AKA any function that does more than tell the time), you should learn how it works, even if you never use it in real life. “A watchmaker has studied for many years to master the craft to make a complication and deserves your respect in appreciating how it works – and how to set it,” says Tania Edwards, co-founder of Collectability, an online retailer specialising in Patek Philippe. “By truly understanding watch complications, you will enjoy collecting watches even more.” Nerdery notwithstanding, knowing the ins and outs of how an object works is a way of rebelling against the plummeting standards of our time.

DIAL INTO THE LINGO

A lot of terminology heard out in the wild is inaccurate. For example, it’s not a watch ‘face’, it’s a ‘dial’. A watch is ticking, but you have no idea whether it’s powered by a battery or... something else? The word you’re looking for is a movement, which can be ‘manual wound’ or ‘automatic’ versus battery-powered quartz. Why should you learn the proper vocabulary for your watch? “So you don’t sound like an idiot,” jokes Isabella Proia of Phillips Watches. “Any subculture has its own language, and when you become part of it, those words tend to become part of you – as long as you’re paying attention.”

Don’t Believe the Hype

One minute you’re swearing you don’t follow trends, the next you’re buying a pair of Sambas. It’s difficult not to get lightly swayed by trends, but you can follow your heart, too. If you’re faithful to a 41mm Breitling but are curious about a Piaget Polo, ask yourself this: will I really wear it? Realistically evaluate your personal style and make your choice accordingly.

Get Leathered, in Moderation

Emilie Hawtin, founder of Clementina, a tailoring-focused womenswear line, says, “Don’t overthink your watch strap. Black and dark-brown leather are versatile and elegant. Just make sure you don’t wear shoes in a much lighter shade than your watch. And if you do, make sure they’re suede or sneakers.”

Don’t Buy Affordable Alternatives

If you want the Rolex GMT-Master II, don’t buy the knockoff. Instead, get creative and buy something totally unlike it until you save up for the real thing. Call me a snob, but it’s pretty embarrassing to have someone say, “I love your Rolex!” when actually, it’s the Seiko designed to look just like it.

Give a Ring; Receive a Watch

In many cultures throughout Asia and the Middle East, it is customary for a bride and groom to exchange watches in celebration of their wedding – and it’s catching on. After Toronto-based photographer Matthew Marchanda popped the question, he was surprised to become the benefactor of an Omega Seamaster. “Usually we give the ring, and if we’re lucky we get a Guinness chocolate-flavoured wedding cake,” Marchanda tells me. “For the woman of my dreams to give me a watch I’ve dreamt of since I was a kid – it’s like this massive horological hug from the person you love.”

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Think Outside the Box

Asking for box and papers has become a knee-jerk question for new enthusiasts, but prioritising these over quality is a mistake. "It is rare to find watches from 30 years ago with papers. Back then, they were a one-year warranty from the manufacturer. Once that year ended, they held little value and were mostly discarded," says Bedwell. "If they have paperwork, all the better for it. However, this is not a determining factor."

A Rollie Is Never a Bad Idea

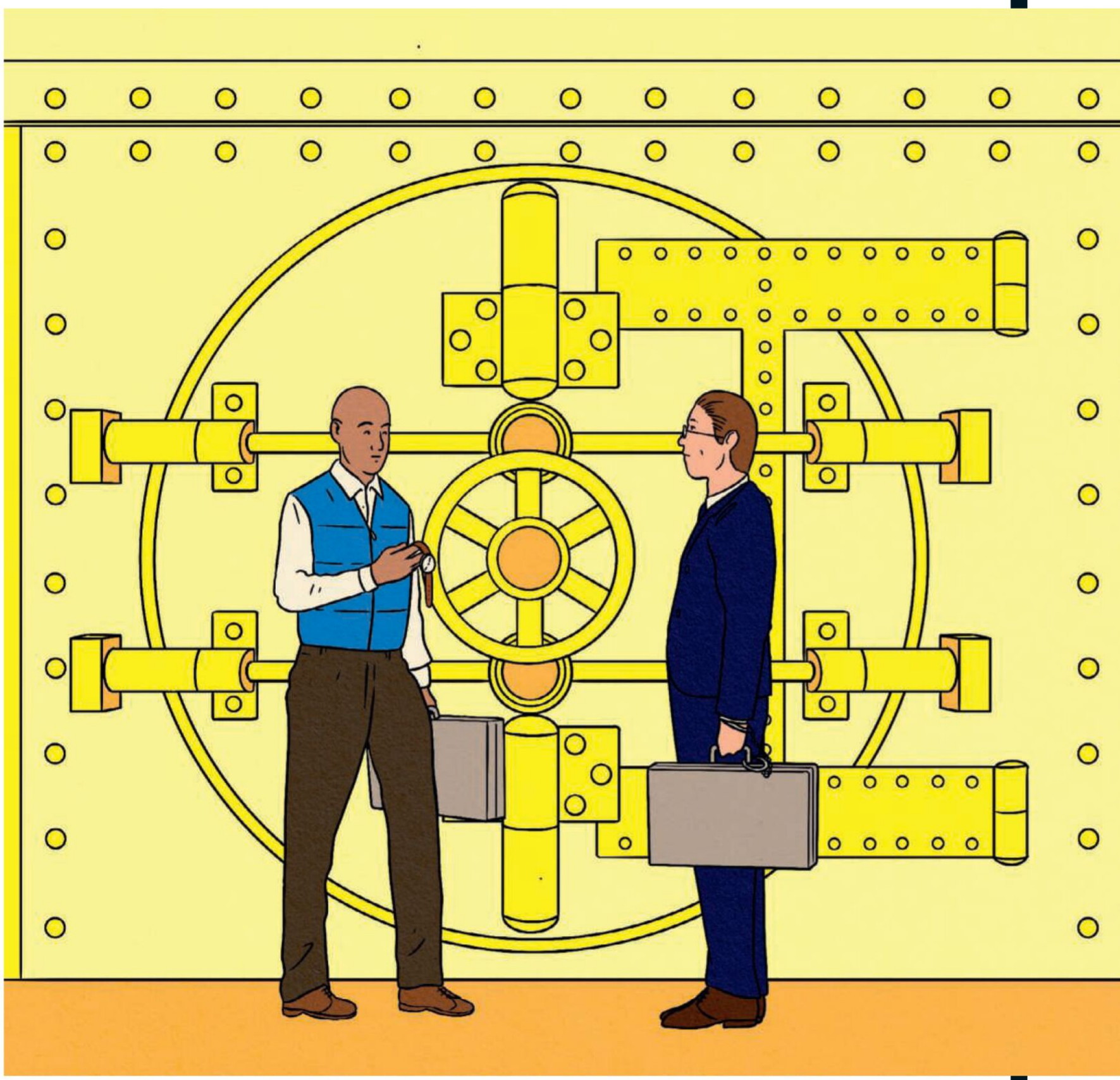
There are many reasons why Rolex is so ubiquitous, starting with the fact that most people can actually pronounce the name. (Try saying Jaeger-LeCoultre without a French lesson!) Unlike JLC (go with that, FYI), Rolex is a household name, but this does not make it any less worthy. "A watch known for making it to the top of the highest mountain and the bottom of the deepest sea, Rolex has come to symbolise courage, achievement, and the ability to conquer," says Geoff Hess, Sotheby's global head of watches and the founder of RollieFest, a Rolex collector meet-up in New York. "Its popularity should surprise no one."

First Date Protocol Is Up To You

Getting ready for a dinner date with that hottie you matched with online, you come to a horological crossroads: modest Omega Speedmaster you know and love, or limited-edition Royal Oak borrowed from a loaded mate? Are you a 'go big or go home' guy, or would you feel odd wearing a watch that costs more than most cars? There's no right answer, but if you decide to go big, probably best you pay the bill.

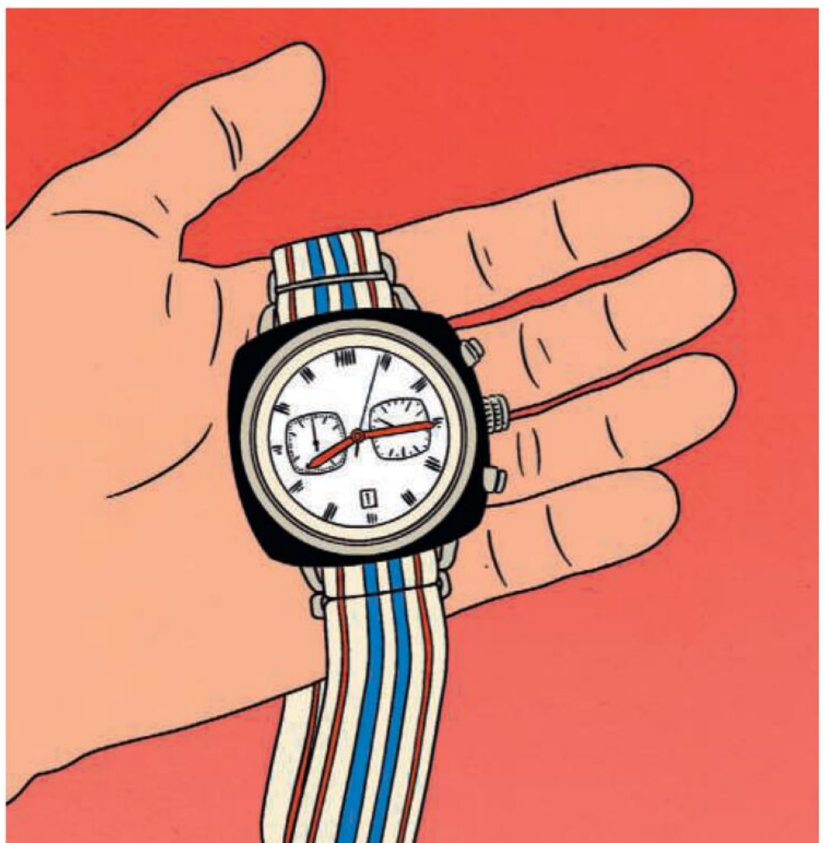
Clothes First

When it comes to getting dressed, anyone basing an outfit around their watch first must have a shit tonne of watches. Style guru and New York native Elias Marte *does* have a shit-tonne of watches, but says it's best to let the watch be the cherry on the cake. "Typically, people are seeing more of your outfit than the accessory on your wrist. Only those physically close to you are going to spot the watch."



Passion Trumps Asset Potential

Is this watch a good investment?! "Our answer is always the same," says Edwards. "Buy what you love, wear it, and enjoy wearing it." Yes, some watches fetch millions at auction but don't be swayed by such occurrences. "Now certain watch brands [such as Rolex and Patek Philippe] and models have achieved the status as an 'asset class'. This means they are susceptible to the same criteria as any asset class and the stock market – they can go up and they can go down in value," she continues. The true value is passion and knowledge. "A fine timepiece should be regarded as the work of art that it is."



Go Incog-Nato

Designed by the British MoD in the '70s, Nato straps are rugged, made from woven nylon and resistant to water and grime. Thom Bettridge, *i-D* editor-in-chief, put his Rolex Submariner on one because steel bracelets get sweaty in summer. "I've gotten flak for [it], but I'm in good company," he says. One of the Olsen twins has her Sub on a Nato. "The only no-no is if it's a watch with an integrated bracelet. I've yet to see a Royal Oak on a Nato, and I hope I never do," adds Bettridge. Reserve the Nato for sports and tool watches. Let your dressy Patek Philippe Calatrava stay dressy.

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TIMEPIECES

From a £60 blue resin T80 to the £260 M79 automatic, collectors are buying in to Timex, and so are some of the world's coolest menswear brands.

TIMEX STILL HAS THE X-FACTOR

How a 'practical but not boring' ethos supercharged the watchmaker of the people.

Story by **Charlie Teasdale** Photograph by **Alex Bibby**

SET DESIGN, ALFIE DI TROLIO.

IN JUNE, A £200 WATCH SOLD out in five minutes. This is nothing new for luxury watch brands that like to dabble in hype economy – high-end manufacturers doing low-cost collabs, "signature" watches for celebs, etc – but for a "cheap" brand such as Timex to do it feels important.

The Sun and Moon watch looks a little bit like a Cartier Tank Chinoise. The result of Timex teaming up with zany New York clothing brand Noah, it features a 37 x 25mm rectangular case, quartz movement with AM/PM indicator (the sun and moon bit), and a black leather strap with a crocodile-skin pattern.

"Noah and Timex have quite a bit in common," explains Brendon Babenzien, co-founder of Noah and formerly of Supreme. "Most importantly, I believe Timex and Noah share the goal of making great products that are practical but not boring."

Timex has been doing exactly that for 170 years. The brand quietly makes watches that look good, tell the time, and barely dent the bank (the cheapest Timex is a £40 tool watch on a fabric strap). But over the past few years, it has turned up the cool factor – emerging as a watchmaker that offers genuine style for less than £200.

"The beauty of Timex is that it's a watch for everyone," says Todd Snyder, founder of the eponymous clothing brand, and a long-time Timex collaborator. "For 170 years, Timex has democratised time with high-quality, thoughtfully designed timepieces that combine heritage and modern innovation."

Snyder is known for his preppy Americana workwear, and the Timex watches he brought to the US market – kicking off in 2016 with a reimagined classic Waterbury Chronograph for the runway – have been hugely successful. "I have always been drawn to collaborating with best-in-class American heritage brands that share an obsessive attention to design, craftsmanship, and quality," says Snyder.

Timex collabs have branched out over the years... They are a badge of honour for cool menswear brands, and in turn, it is cool to wear a Timex.

As well as still working with Snyder, Timex has branched out with its collaborations over the past few years: NN.07, Adsum, Adidas Originals, Finisterre, and Nigel Cabourn (the Survival Watch is my everyday beater) to name a few. A Timex collab has become a badge of honour for cool menswear brands, and in turn, it is cool to wear a Timex – not because someone might from a distance mistake it for a Daytona or Universal Genève, but because they're cool all by themselves.

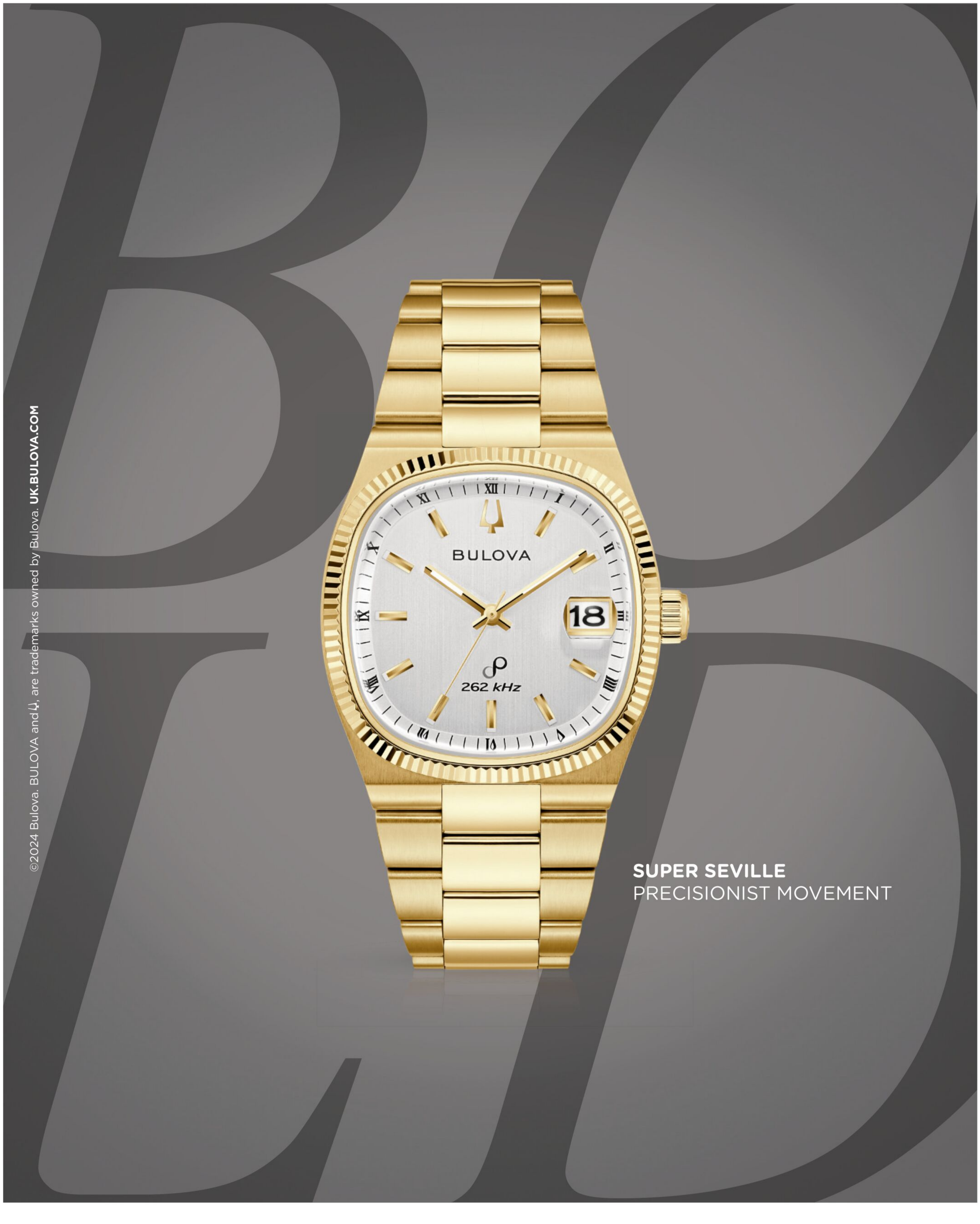
The driving force of Timex's golden age are what it calls the Reissues, which demonstrate the sheer breadth and all-American madness of its archive. Highlights include the Q – a 1979 sports watch with a two-tone bezel and integrated strap – and the Marlin, a 1960s dress watch forever destined for Don Draper's wrist. In August, Timex dropped a reissue of the 1975 Enigma, replete with 'mystery' indices-less dial and 37mm steel tonneau case. Only £180, it looks like something out of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Noah x Timex Sun and Moon £200.

It seems mad that these watches just keep rolling out of the Timex factory without the fanfare they deserve. OK, they're not handmade (parts are produced and shipped from factories dotted across the planet), but which other watchmaker is able to delve into a 170-year-old archive, pull out a killer design, update it, and sell it for less than £200? Which other brand even wants to?

Some succour can be found in the Noah collab selling out. The massive demand led to a second drop, which also sold out immediately. So now, if you want one, you have to drop the best part of a grand on StockX. Proof that great watches aren't necessarily defined by precious metals or proprietary movements... but vibes. ●

CHARLIE TEASDALE IS A WATCH AND STYLE CONTRIBUTOR FOR *BRITISH GQ*.



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Living on

After years of shaping the culture through art, stunts, and beautiful provocation, Slawn has collected no shortage of praise. But the 24-year-old abstract impressionist has also been collecting an astonishing array of rare and wild watch grails – including a few of his own design.

By **Mike Christensen**
Photographs by **James Pearson-Howes**

Slawn Time

IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE I LAST STUCK an ollie, and even then it was only with my fingers. But sitting amid the beautiful chaos that is Olaolu Akeredolu-Ale's home – a townhouse on one of East London's most buzzy streets – I'm attempting the trick once more with a Tech Deck fingerboard borrowed from his two-year-old son, who's now next door trying to colour in (with limited Crayola application) a miniature *Brat*-green Lamborghini Aventador. His father has not yet appeared.

If you know Akeredolu-Ale – aka the British-Nigerian art sensation Slawn – at all, you'll appreciate that what at first seems like chaos is probably heavily curated. A glass bottle of Daylesford apple juice sits invitingly open on a coffee table, next to some incense smouldering over a hardback copy of Gabriel Moses' *Regina* and Yotam Ottolenghi's *Simple* cookbook. On the wall, a version of Henry Taylor's famous "Cicely and Miles Visit the Obamas" is printed across a trio of skateboards hanging next to Slawn's own artwork "Dying Wish", a black and white print on another triptych of skateboards.

"Skating is what took me to noticing everything that was art, everything graffiti," Slawn would tell me later, rewinding the clock back to Lagos in 2015 when Jomi Marcus-Bello, founder of Nigeria's first skate shop, Wafflesncream, gave him his earliest art job. "It wasn't even skill that Jomi saw. I think I wrote to him with a bunch of drawings. Maybe it was the versatility of them that [meant] he was like, 'Yeah, this kid has got something.'"

Today, Slawn's name and work is being uttered in the same creative spaces as Virgil Abloh, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Keith Haring – artists who strode between high art and luxury, as desirable among streetwear heads as they are to the Mayfair set. Collectors and known admirers such as Skepta, A$AP Rocky, and Central Cee know game when they see it. Slawn's work, represented by Efie Gallery, has been sold by Saatchi Yates and Sotheby's; he's designed a Brit award; and his custom Louis Vuitton bags are now collectors' items.

Eventually, Slawn comes jogging up the stairs and greets me with a dap, vape and phone in the other hand. He's topless save for the numerous chains around his neck, revealing tattoos on his upper body and Supreme underwear. Repositioning his green Punkandyo cap, he apologises: he's having a bit of grief with people saying "junk" about him online. "Just like, 'Olaolu Slawn is in the Illuminati.' I'm like..."

Glued to his phone, he's momentarily a bit vexed but it's OK – the pink Always Do What You Should Do joggers he's paired with his "I'd Rather Be Whizzing Around With Ya" slippers do the talking while he sorts his shit out. Behind us, on the floor, there's a mini Scalextric track and a multicoloured train set next to a Berrics mini skatepark with a yellow sticker that reads "Don't Ever Stop Hopping Fences". On the low sideboard below a dizzyingly large television are a pair of boxing gloves with Slawn's spray-painted signature motif, alongside a handwritten, hand-painted book called *Dada and Beau* by Mama. Mama is Tallula Christie, Slawn's partner and mother to his two sons. The book is open and I read a passage, "With their speedy skateboards and their matching new shoes, they zipped through the streets in their signature groove. Dada was quick with a loopity-loop trick, while Beau spun around and did a kickflip."

"Cool, I'm ready now," Slawn says, pulling up a kid's-size chair and sitting down at his son's arts and crafts table. We're here to talk about his growing fondness for wristwatches – cheap ones, expensive ones, dress ones, gold ones, custom ones, and grails he covets – which is why on a stack of his eldest son Beau's latest scribbles and artwork, Slawn's watch collection is laid out in front of us.

"Truthfully, I didn't know much about watches until I came to London," Slawn says. That was in 2018, when he first moved to the UK, where he later enrolled in a graphic design course at Middlesex University aged 18. "I knew about the Cartier Crash and all that, but a couple of my friends started getting into watches and were like, 'It's an investment.' So I started looking into them and that's how I ended up here."

"Here" is owning two different-vibe Patek Philippes, a gold Rolex Datejust, a stainless-steel Datejust, and a selection of G-Shocks – plus there's the small matter of his own limited-edition customised Rollie.

"If I see [a watch] I like I'll buy it, regardless of whether it's going to have value in the future," he says. "I'm very lazy in how I think about things; usually when I have something on my mind it's straightforward and I just do it. So it's not like I'm looking deeply into it."

He doesn't really wear his vintage Patek Ref 3859 – which is a manual-winding unisex dress watch from 1982 – that much. "I just like smaller faces," he says. He also owns a Patek Aquanaut that he got this year because he wanted a classic. "This one's my daily," he says, looking fondly at his gold Datejust, "and this one's a daily as well," his finger pointing in the direction of the same model in steel. For Slawn, the main difference between the two DJs is the weight. "I like feeling something is on my arm." His favourite piece was another Datejust that he gifted to his dad, but the watch that's most sacred to him for entirely different reasons is a turquoise G-Shock that his son customised. "G-Shocks are a beautiful entry watch, man," he says. "[Beau] just painted this one and I've kept it ever since."

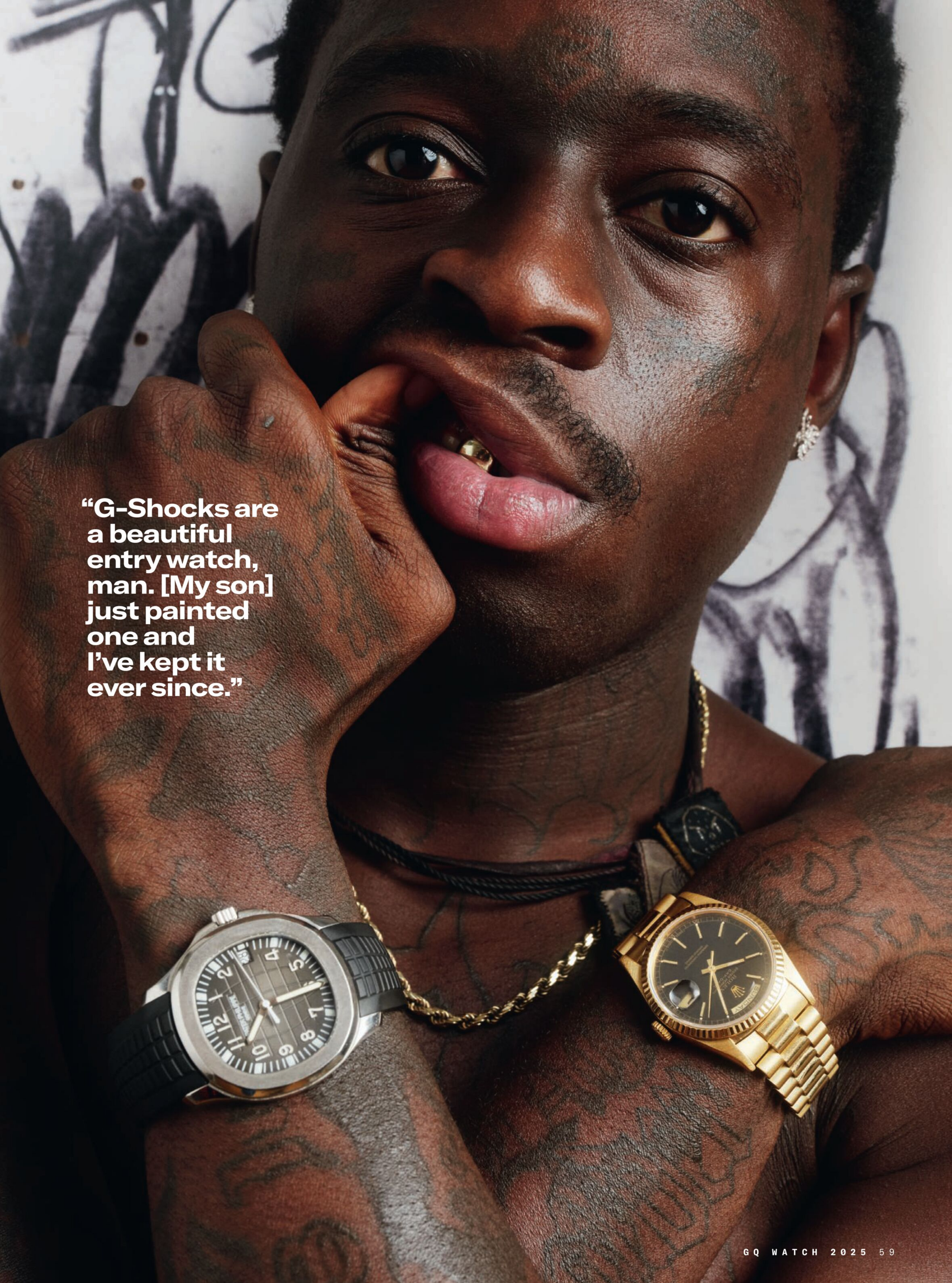
Slawn used to wear lots of bracelets on his left wrist, but when he got into watches the bling got usurped and moved to his right hand. "I keep them separate because I like my bracelets big, so they hang over my fingers." Clearly not a fan of wearing watches with bracelets then? "Nah, nah, nah, man." Does he abide by any watch rules? "Everything goes out the window when it comes to me," he says. "I don't like people telling me how to do things."

Right and previous page: **Artist Slawn with his Patek Philippe Aquanaut and gold Rolex Datejust.** Left: **The same Patek and Rolex alongside his steel Datejust and the custom 'Slawnex' that bears his work on the dial.**

IT'S PROBABLY NOT INTENTIONAL, BUT AN appointment at the Kettle Kids' showroom with brothers Harvey and Jacob Hutson feels like you're walking onto the set of a *Kingsman* movie directed by Guy Ritchie (there are hints of *Lock, Stock* and *The Gentlemen* about the place). In a short space of time, the pair have made a name for themselves as the go-to Mayfair stop for sourcing luxury watches, both new and secondhand. Certainly as far as Slawn's obsession with watches goes, the Kettle Kids are largely to blame.

"Some days, Slawn will pop in and be like, 'Yeah, I had a crazy day, man, so I'm going to mark today with a watch,'" older brother Harvey says, sitting beneath an original Slawn in the bunker-like showroom. "Each piece is a milestone for him, which is a great way to build a collection."

It was during one of these random pop-ins that the idea to create what we're coining the 'Slawnex' was born – ten Rolex Datejusts customised with Slawn's "Berlin" artwork from his Worldwide collection. A spray-painted winged heart and big-


“G-Shocks are a beautiful entry watch, man. [My son] just painted one and I’ve kept it ever since.”

eyed yellow face tagged with “Luv U Berlin” fills the dial. It sold out within minutes of Slawn posting it on his Instagram in June. “Slawn was in the store,” says Jacob, 26, “and we were just saying, ‘Wouldn’t it be cool to do something that no one else has done – to print a piece of artwork with a lacquer finish on a watch?’”

“I did a mock-up on the design then I sent it to them and they did the rest,” says Slawn. “It’s nice to have people that you trust doing it.” As far as inspiration goes, there were two: the one-of-one blacked-out Patek Philippe Nautilus Mad Paris made for Virgil Abloh, and a certain Supreme custom. “Rolex and Supreme did one so I was like, ‘Why hasn’t anyone else done this?’ That’s literally the vibe I wanted to go for. People are afraid of doing something. They worry if anyone is going to buy it. But I was like, ‘Fuck it. I’ll just do it.’”

Slawn played around for a little bit and settled on a face that was “a little bit wacky”. He and the Kettle Kids then went back and forth a bit before they figured the most Slawn thing to do would be to “just make a watch that’s mad ugly and different”.

There is still method behind the choice of custom canvas. “We chose a Datejust 41 because the dial itself has the biggest surface area, so you can see more of the art,” says Jacob. “It’s also the most popular size people are wearing at the moment.”

“And I wanted to go simple with a nice jubilee bracelet because the artwork is kind of loud. I thought, Let’s make it a bit special for people,” Slawn adds. Each of the ten is numbered; as well as a Slawn engraving on the caseback and a Rolex card in his own style, he also customised the boxes by hand, so each is unique.

“We’ve put a piece of art into a Rolex and made it unique,” says Harvey. It sold out before the Kettle Kids even posted about it. “Lil Yachty got one, Stormzy has got one. [Fulham footballer] Reiss Nelson has one,” says Slawn. Another rapper known to be big into his watches was Slawn’s happiest customer. “Dave’s such a G, man. He said he likes the watch a lot. I appreciate him for that,” he says, chuffed as hell that a musician of Dave’s status and horological nous was spotted wearing his Slawnex. If celebrity collectors Drake or John Mayer come calling, would he make another for them? “No,” he says. “Maybe I’ll do another one in a bit. But I don’t think it will be the same one.”

On occasion, Slawn’s been known to drop new artwork that can only be acquired via one of his “fight clubs” – think MoonSwatch queues but artier and rowdier, where fans rush to his studio for the chance to get a painting for free. Maybe a missed opportunity with his Rolex? “Coming out and fighting for it? I didn’t do that, but that would have been really sick,” he says. “I feel like if I’m to do another watch it would just be completely different, maybe like a skeleton dial. I’m always down to open my mind to stuff and trickeries and whatnot.”

These trickeries are why people can’t get enough of Slawn. Everything he touches is an overnight success. “Popular culture, especially within the context of Black creativity, has always subverted traditional notions of status and hierarchy,” explains Sotheby’s cataloguer Elikem Logan, who was responsible for including some of Slawn’s work in the Modern & Contemporary African Art auction earlier this year. “In this light, Slawn’s Rolex is less about pure counterculture and more a reflection of his ability to traverse cultural boundaries. He seamlessly moves between the world of high luxury and the realms of street culture and mass appeal. I see his Rolex as a symbol not just of status, but of Slawn’s ability to blend these seemingly disparate worlds.”

Above and right: **Slawn’s Aquanaut and Rolexes alongside his smaller Patek Philippe Ref 3859, and the turquoise G-Shock painted by his two-year-old son, Beau.**

Dan Rookwood, CMO of Kick Game – a brand that's fired up the sneaker resale game in the UK – has witnessed Slawn's creative genius firsthand since the artist was announced as an investor in July. He loves that Slawn is not classically brand-safe. "He's the *enfant terrible* that dusty old brands don't quite know what to do with yet. But for Kick Game, he is perfect. He can have a brilliant idea in the morning and we can literally be shooting it in the afternoon and putting it out the following day. He asks for forgiveness, not permission."

Rookwood gets what it is about Slawn that's so exciting: "Like Virgil Abloh, Slawn is a prolific multi-hyphenate. The word 'disruptor' is much over-used, but in the case of Slawn it's spot on. Abloh famously embraced counterfeit culture as the ultimate compliment. But what Slawn is doing isn't counterfeit to my mind, it's counterculture. There's now a whole new generation of kids who want a Rolex or a Rimowa suitcase because of Slawn. He's taking something old and established and making it new and freshly relevant.

"People said Keith Haring wasn't an artist, he just doodled the same thing over and over again on the subway," Rookwood adds. "Now look. Critics have been similarly dismissive about Banksy's stencil art, about Warhol's mass-produced pop art. Now look. You look at Slawn's work and you instantly know it's his."

BACK AT SLAWN'S SON'S TABLE, TALK HAS turned to how humans have been making watches since the 1700s. "Everything blows my mind. The fact I'm sitting in a house with walls and stuff, it just feels like a game; it doesn't make sense that we have electricity and the TV," he says. "None of it makes sense, but I'm not complaining."

For the duration of our conversation, Slawn has been picking at something – maybe a fingernail. I ask if there's a creative spirit in him that likes to always do something with his hands. "I'm down to play around with anything, really. Like I'm playing around with something on the table right now," he says, holding out what looks like dried up Play-Doh. "It's my need to just pick things apart and put them back together in an odd way. History is more involved in my art than anything else. I feel like that's what my work is based on. It's not the art, it's not really the work, it's about the timeframe of when the work was made. I want my work to expand everything, to evolve into something deeper, because if it doesn't then what's the use of doing it?"

Slawn regularly shies away from being called an artist. But the ease with which he's cultivated a persona that, like it or not, positions him at the top end of popular culture speaks volumes for his ability to make himself and his work that previously very unsexy word: *accessible*.

"Artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat were celebrated for their untamed creativity," says Logan. "Slawn's lack of self-definition allows him to produce incredible work, which resonates with a broad audience. It gives his work timelessness."

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that of all the recent watch releases, Slawn digs the trio of Keith Haring Swatches the most. "Yeah, I'd love to do a Swatch one," he says (note to Swatch CEO Nick Hayek Jr, if you're reading). "In Nigeria, Swatch was the brand everyone wore to school. They had a shop there, too. You want to make yourself accessible at some point so I'd love to do some wacky-ass Swatch where you can't tell the time."

More G-Shocks from Slawn's collection.

"I'm down to play around with anything. It's my need to pick things apart and put them back together in an odd way."

There's some commotion downstairs – a couple of Slawn's mates have popped over to hang, mainly with Beau it seems. After helping Slawn box up his precious timepieces, I say my goodbyes and promise to hook him up with some Swatch contacts.

On the staircase, a quartet of pictures escorts you to the front door. It's a Bycodycody series entitled "Day Dreams", each featuring a little red-horned devil dog being showered, albeit reluctantly, with flowers. Such is the placement of these that they're the last thing Slawn sees as he leaves the security of the beautiful chaos he's building around him and ventures out into the big wide world. I wonder if he does so daydreaming that he's that dog – eyes alert, devilish, and dead set on refusing to receive his flowers. ●

MIKE CHRISTENSEN IS EDITOR OF *GQ WATCH* AND *GQ* LIFESTYLE DIRECTOR.

No matter where you are in the country – north, south, east, west – the process of buying a watch comes with a sliding scale of emotions attached.

Point of

This page:
A 2021 Rolex Datejust 126333 handled with kid gloves at The Swiss Link, Huddersfield.
Opposite:
Showroom director Robert Tomsett at Mappin & Webb in Bluewater, Kent.

Sale

And often, the deciding factor is the people behind the counter.

By **Charlie Teasdale**

Photographs by **Juan Trujillo Andrades**

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JAMES LLOYD COLE IS IMPOSINGLY ELEGANT, with high cheekbones and a dark, rakish man-bob. A candy-stripe shirt, tassel loafers, and Drake's cravat only serve to augment his air of authority. He is, he tells me, the only man in Huddersfield with any meaningful interest in classic menswear.

I first saw Lloyd Cole, the marketing and social media manager and public face of pre-owned watch retailer The Swiss Link (TSL), on Instagram. By day, the photographer and content creator manages his own Instagram account – a moodboard-style feed of woozy, bucolic cottages and rural tableaux, with a million-strong following – but has been working with TSL part-time since the spring.

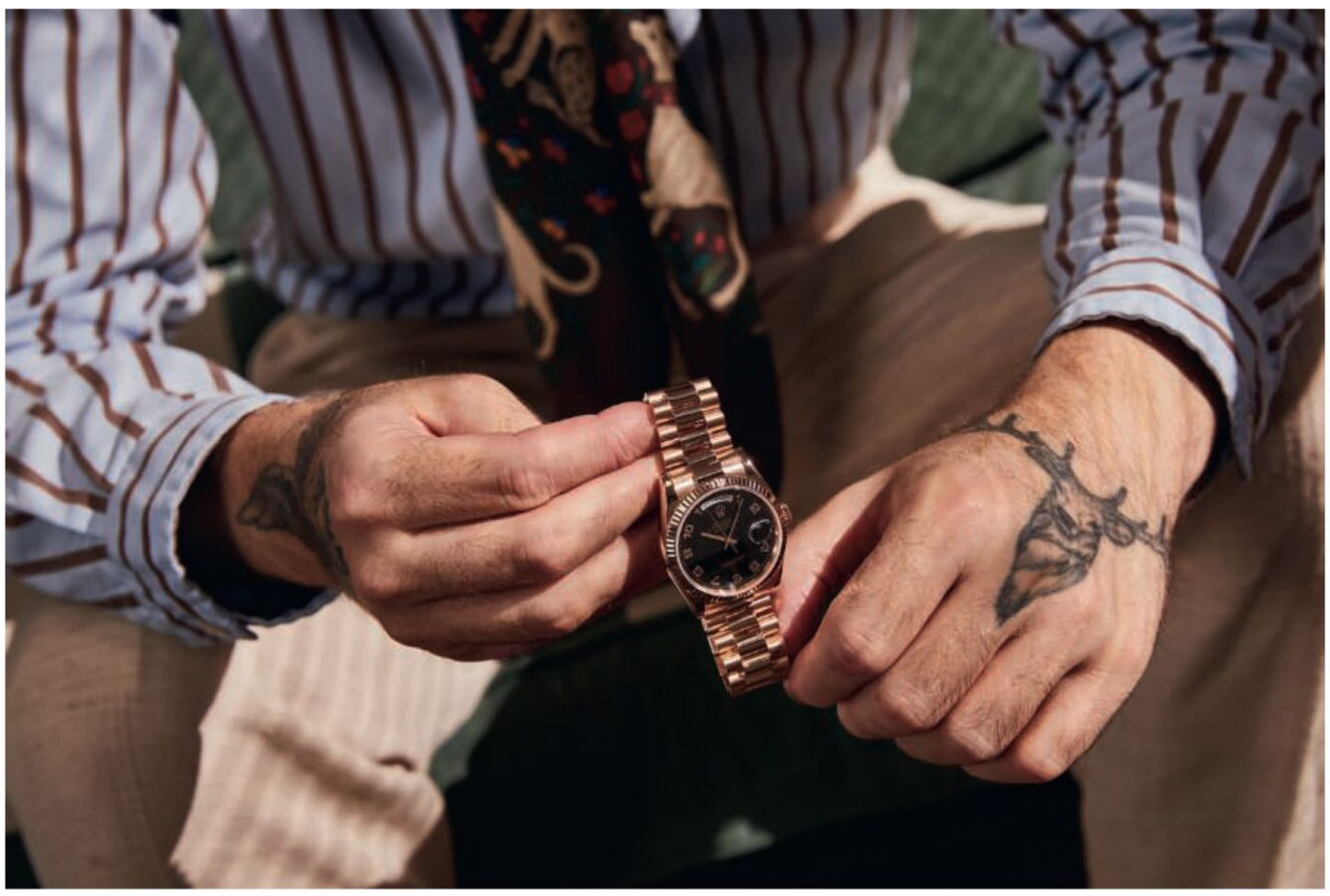
Founder and operations manager Dan Scarpitta brought Lloyd Cole on to help boost brand awareness and help mark TSL out from the myriad dealers on the UK's booming secondary market. It worked. Lloyd Cole's amiable delivery and outlandish style – outlandish for the watch industry and Huddersfield, at least – has helped the company's Instagram following shoot up in the past six months. The comments are mixed, but engagement is engagement.

I find myself in TSL's headquarters – located in a factory-turned-office block in the suburbs of the Yorkshire town – on a bright Tuesday in September because I'm investigating what you could call the 'quiet majority' of the UK watch market. That is to say, the dealers, makers, and brokers that operate outside the Switzo-London bubble. I want to know how and why watches are bought and sold in, well, real places, how businesses operate without the oligarch's siren-song of a glowing Bond Street shop front, or the flex of a top-hatted doorman trained in close-quarters combat.

"We're very fussy with what we buy," explains Scarpitta, who represents an antipode aesthetic to Lloyd Cole. In a navy T-shirt and black loafers, he is stocky and sleeve-tattooed, but measured and gentle, almost solemn in his desire to sell nice watches. "And it's hard getting that message across. Building a business takes time."

TSL started trading when the pre-owned market was booming. For a while, post-pandemic, it was a seller's paradise, and whatever you bought (especially Rolexes) tended to go up in value. "I could have paid anything for a chocolate [coloured] Yachtmaster and three weeks later it would be worth £500 more," remembers Lloyd Cole. But the boom crested in the spring of 2022, and prices quickly started to roll back down. "We're in the process of the consumer starting to learn that if you buy a [new] Rolex now, you are going to lose money on it," he adds.

"Now, it's a buyer's market," says Scarpitta. "The prices have come down so far from where they were, but they've more or less settled,



Clockwise from above: **Face of The Swiss Link James Lloyd Cole; outside the Huddersfield HQ; showing a 2003 Rolex Day-Date 118235.**

"TSL customers will soon receive a certificate with each watch, confirming a thorough inspection."

so there's more confidence." Vintage watch dealerships such as TSL can no longer just wait for a watch to appreciate – money is made by moving quickly and offering unbeatable margins. Scarpitta points to a rhodium-dial Datejust on the table. "It's £900 cheaper [from TSL] than anybody else online," he says. "I know it is." Scarpitta paid £8,000 for it in a part exchange deal for a Batman GMT-Master II, and is selling it for £9,000. "So we're not greedy," he says. "And the customer is getting a watch that's nearly a grand cheaper than everywhere else."

The challenge for TSL is to convince people of its legitimacy in an often murky world. TSL had a satellite showroom on London's Oxford Street for two years, but being among established dealers and boutiques, it was impossible to get people through the door. (Not to mention the rent, which was 30 times higher than in Huddersfield.)

Lloyd Cole's Partridgian presence on social media has helped to give the company a human touchpoint, too – "Now I'm on the video, they see a real person, a real business," he says – and word of mouth is gradually spreading.

You can buy TSL watches from eBay or Chrono24, or book an appointment at the showroom. And TSL will soon launch an authentication service via the expertise of an ex-Rolex watchmaker. Customers will receive a certificate with each watch, confirming a thorough inspection. "I don't know anyone else offering that," he says.

TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE MILES AWAY AT MAPPIN & Webb's Bluewater showroom, peace of mind comes easy. I visit the store on a Friday afternoon, and having never been to this specific corner of the Kent retail scene, I am surprised at the sheer number of places to buy a watch. There are Goldsmiths, Omega, and Breitling boutiques (all managed by the Watches of Switzerland group), a Bremont store, and an imminent Tag Heuer outlet cocooned in pre-opening hoardings. There is even a branch of Watchfinder & Co, bolstering a global portfolio that includes boutiques in Macau, Qatar, and Geneva.

Mappin & Webb looks to be flanked by a Rolex boutique on one side and Cartier boutique on the other, but on closer inspection it's

Right: **Lloyd Cole gives writer Charlie Teasdale a hand at The Swiss Link.**
Below: **Mappin & Webb's core showroom, which is flanked by Rolex- and Cartier-branded wings.**

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just one big store with branded wings. I loiter outside for a moment and watch a fifties-ish man in Common Project trainers linger at the window, his eyes fixed on a case of Hublots.

Mappin & Webb is the epitome of old English retail. It has been in business for almost 250 years and held a number of royal warrants over the past century or two; its master craftsman Mark Appleby is the current crown jeweller. "We're one year older than the United States of America," jokes Jason Fitzgerald, the brand's retail director.

I meet Fitzgerald and Richard Bromley, the store's deputy showroom manager, in the plush private lounge at the back of the store. Both men are attired in dark suits and white shirts. Bromley's beard is sculpted and his suit is a three-piece. Fitzgerald's shirt is open at the neck. It is a Friday, after all.

"A lot more people [than before] don't want to have to travel to London," says Bromley, when I ask him how Mappin & Webb stores service the monied and discerning of the UK's second-tier cities. "To sit in a London-style boutique works perfectly. Most of our clients love that they don't have to go to Bond Street to get this experience."

As with TSL, Rolex makes up the healthy majority of sales at Mappin & Webb Bluewater, but the store does a roaring trade in Cartier, too – they recently had to establish a waiting list for the Tank Must because local demand was so high – and they stock watches from Girard Perregaux, IWC, and Panerai, among others.

The bulk of Mappin & Webb's watch sales are done in store, especially with male customers. "There is no rule, but a lot of gents will rationalise a purchase logically," says Fitzgerald, noting how guys will often come in numerous times to handle and test the watch before purchasing. "Could be £500 or £5,000, but you want to feel it."

This is a new, bigger location at Bluewater for Mappin & Webb – three times the size of its previous spot on the lower level – and has been finished in the prevailing modern-luxury style, with beige fabrics, dark wood, and steel. At first glance, it could easily be a hotel lobby in Shanghai or a sports car dealership in Baku.

The more contemporary space has helped to attract a younger, more brand-conscious customer, says Fitzgerald, and in turn, Bromley

Clients will find a watch they like in another store, then call Richard Bromley up so they can buy it from him instead.

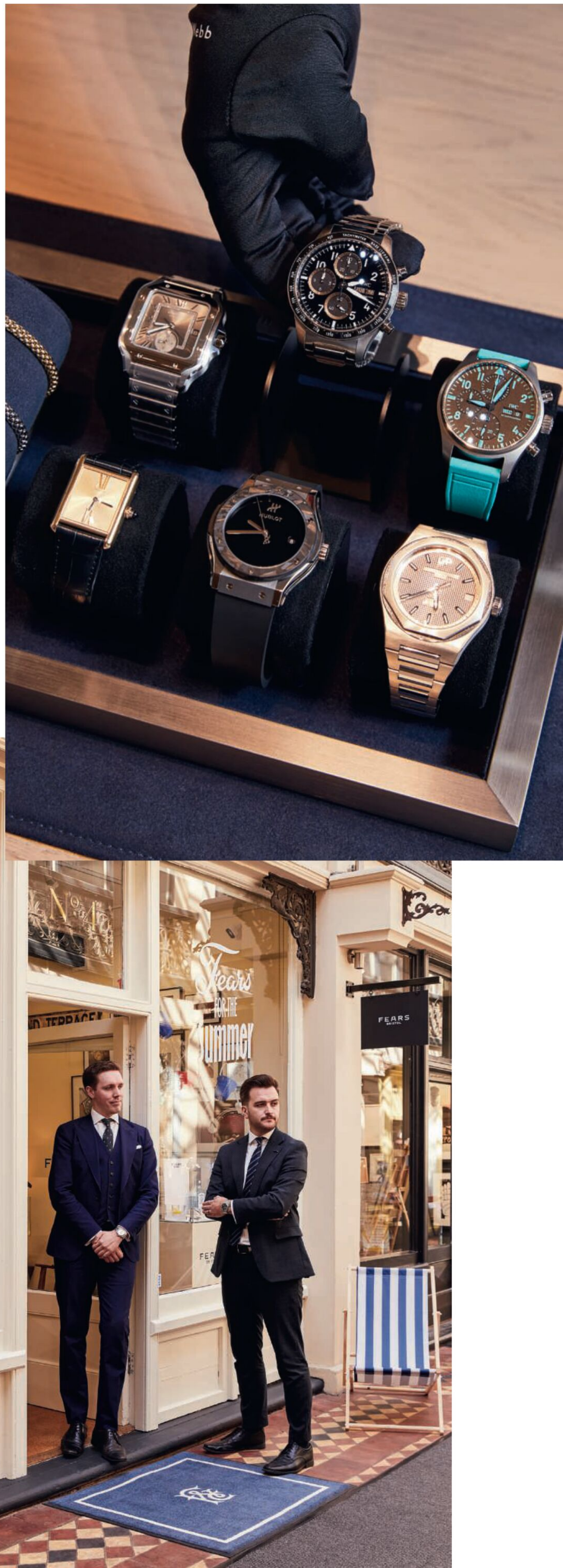
adds, younger-skewing brands such as IWC and Hublot have been getting more attention. He shows me a 42mm Classic Fusion made exclusively for the Watches of Switzerland group, describing the £10,300 watch as a "nice introductory piece" for a first-time collector. The Bluewater store has just one of the 50 limited-edition watches, and Bromley expects it to be sold very soon.

At TSL, the USP is value, whereas at Mappin & Webb, the focus is on outstanding service; the notion that a happy, trusting customer is a repeat one. Bromley tells me he has clients that will find a watch they like in another store, then call him up to see if he has it, just so they can buy it from him instead.

Last week, he tells me, one of his clients wanted to buy a farewell gift for a retiring employee. "This is my budget; I trust you fully," the client told Bromley. Following a fortnight of WhatsApp messages, they settled on one of the pre-owned Rolexes on sale at the store (part of the brand's 'certified' offering) and put the Champagne on ice, ready to surprise the guy a few days later. Tears were shed, I'm told.

"These kinds of things happen weekly," says Fitzgerald.

FOOTFALL IS LESS CONSISTENT AND SPEND-CURIOUS AT THE Clifton Arcade in Bristol. The elegant Victorian shopping destination is home to around 20 businesses, including an art gallery, a single-occupant gym, and Fears Watch Company. "Like the grand arcades of London, you get to ride on the coattails of [architectural] beauty," explains Fears' managing director Nicholas Bowman-Scargill, over tea and macaroons in the modest boutique one rainy afternoon in September. He notes that although the location is set back from the



Right: **A selection box at The Swiss Link, including a black titanium IWC Pilot Performance Chronograph.** Below: **Brand specialist Richard France (left) and boutique manager Todd Harding (right) man the doors at Fears, Bristol.**

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Clockwise from left: **Pocket watches from the Fears archive; Harding at work; showing the Fears Brunswick 38 Midas II.**

road, all the units within the arcade are of equal billing. "If you get a tiny store on the street, it's very clear why you've chosen it," he says.

As an independent British luxury brand, perception is paramount for Fears, and, I guess, Bowman-Scargill himself. The boyish businessman is impeccably tailored and coiffured, and expects the same of his staff. (Ties, I'm told, are part of the company dress code.)

Founded in 1846, Fears was once a powerhouse of British horology, at one stage producing more than 100,000 watches a year from its Bristol workshops. It ran for 130 years before closing in 1976, until Bowman-Scargill reopened it in 2016. The former watchmaker is the sixth generation to lead the family company.

Fears' watches – the collection comprises the Redcliff and Brunswick – are designed and assembled in the UK, and retail from around £3,000, a price point that Bowman-Scargill says the company now "owns". It can be hard for British brands to break out of the plucky underdog bracket in the luxury watch market, but Fears' pricing means it is mixing with the likes of Breitling when it comes to customer appeal, and looking to muscle in on the big Swiss operators. "We are not alternative," says Bowman-Scargill. "We are *an* alternative."

The trouble is that Fears is not backed by big Swiss money. "As a small company with ambition," says Bowman-Scargill, "the biggest skill we need to have is making £5 look like £500." The boutique opened in April, and was intended to double as a working showroom – a place away from the head office for appointments, events, and retail.

Bowman-Scargill wanted it profitable within 18 months, and it was profitable within two. He suggests that only around five per cent of potential customers are collectors and enthusiasts, and so the boutique is aimed at the remaining 95 per cent. They're not reading blogs or listening to horology podcasts, he says, "but every so often, their son's turning 21, their daughter's getting married, and they will go into the local jeweller and buy themselves a nice watch".

Fears' sales are split fairly evenly between retail and wholesale (the US currently takes around 60 per cent of all watches produced), and around 35 per cent of total retail sales happen in the Clifton boutique. But the novelty of a British watchmaker residing in a charming arcade in the chicest corner of the city means that Fears watches are often bought on impulse. Brand specialist and salesperson Richard France tells me that recently a man was waiting to meet friends for lunch near the boutique and happened to wander in, having never heard of Fears before. He left an hour later with a new watch on his wrist and soon came back to buy more for his business partners.

There will be a new Fears boutique somewhere in 2026, Bowman-Scargill says, and he expects the team to double in size in the same time. This year, the workshops will assemble around 1,000 watches, and the aim is to be producing 10,000 a year by the end of 2035.

Bowman-Scargill has every faith that Fears will be a world-beating watch company, but assures me that nothing is guaranteed – even the biggest brands need to constantly push and innovate or risk toppling into obscurity. "The only brand that will never change is Rolex," he says. "Everything else is up for grabs."

FEARS IS ATTEMPTING TO CARVE OUT ITS CORNER IN A STRANGE, heritage-obsessed industry, while the TSL guys are doing their best to broker between the lines on an ever-shifting landscape. At Mappin & Webb, the salespeople bank on special occasions, pay-day splurges, and brand alignment to drive traffic to their shimmering cabinets.

But the key takeaway from my little adventure in time centres on the inanimate product at the heart of the industry. Despite being fundamentally obsolete, the watch has managed to achieve a rare state of multifaceted meaning in modern society, representing different things to different people. A watch can be a piece of art or an heirloom imbued with nostalgia. It can be a shortcut to status, a token of taste, or a simple unit of worth: the perfect place to keep a spare ten grand. In fact, the same watch can be all of those things at once.

So until the day the crops fail, and the cities crumble, and watches just become old clocks that nobody wants, the people I met – and thousands more in the wider industry – have just one job: to make sure the right watch gets to you when you need it. ●

CHARLIE TEASDALE IS A WATCH AND STYLE CONTRIBUTOR FOR *BRITISH GQ*.

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LONDON'S

This page: **Chiefer Appiah wearing a rose-gold ring set with colourless VVS diamonds made for a private client.** Opposite: **his 2019 Patek Philippe Nautilus 5980 set in full pavé 35 carat natural VVS diamonds.**

CROWNED JEWELLER

He has athletes, musical legends, and VIPs queuing for the chance to shop his uniquely curated blend of jewellery and horological grails. Now, having made a name in the UK's gate-kept scene, Chiefer Appiah is reinvesting in the next generation of dealers who look like him.

By **Rachel Felder**

Photographs by **Tom Cockram**

THERE ARE PLENTY OF PLACES TO BUY NEW AND pre-owned luxury watches in London's Mayfair, but the majority of them tend to have a similar, homogenous feel: straight-laced, swanky, frequently formal, and not especially conducive to making clients feeling relaxed. At Chiefer Jewellery, which opened on Berkeley Street in 2023, there's a vibe shift.

The boutique's feel – welcoming, unpretentious – is fuelled by Chiefer Appiah, the watch and jewellery dealer who founded it. His enthusiasm and pride in his wares is contagious – unless, of course, you choose a watch that he feels doesn't suit you, at which point you'll be discouraged to buy it. Like Appiah, the store would make anyone feel comfortable. That, along with the selection, attracts a wide range of mostly repeat customers, about 40 per cent of which come for his edit of collectible timepieces.

"I've got [everyone] from musical artists to bankers to multibillionaires – it's literally all over the place," Appiah says, sitting in the store's downstairs VIP lounge with a stainless-steel Rolex 'Panda' Daytona on his wrist. "It's a beautiful thing because it's a cocktail of different people." In that mix are footballers, boxers, rappers, and pop stars, along with quite a lot of clientele from the neighbourhood.

Appiah – officially Kwaku Antwi Adjei, but known to all as Chiefer – is admittedly different to the typical boutique owners in the neighbourhood. Black, of Ghanaian descent, and raised on a council estate in Tottenham, north London, he ended up selling in Mayfair through grit, hard work, charm, and his self-taught knowledge of an industry that's traditionally family-run and white. As he put it, "I never dreamed of this, but my determination pushed me to do it."

The store's selection of mostly pre-owned watches, with the occasional vintage timepiece added for good measure, includes items from the brands you'd expect – Rolex, Patek Philippe, and Audemars Piguet – as well as top-tier independents. Most of what's on offer is gold but not particularly showy, although there's usually a Nautilus, Aquanaut, 'Starbucks' Submariner, or customised pieces such as diamond-covered Santoses for sale. On a recent afternoon, for example, the array included a white-gold 36mm Datejust, a limited-edition Grade 5 titanium 44mm Machine with a green dial, and a 41mm openworked rose-gold Royal Oak with a double barrel movement.

Some of the store's decor is a bit quirky: a constantly changing array of 32 timepieces are displayed on a massive circular wall installation that looks like it might have been borrowed from a game show set. On the ceiling are giant metallic balls Appiah designed and placed by hand, one by one.

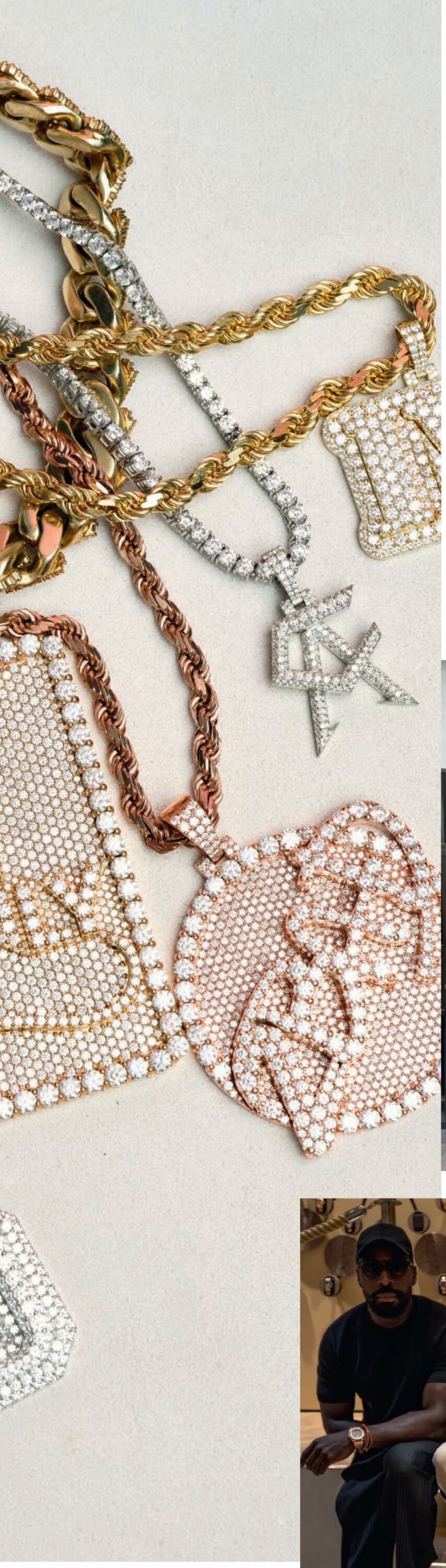
The watch selection is sourced from a network of contacts that Appiah has gradually built up over the years. It includes everyone from venerable dealers in Hatton Garden to customers who are ready to part with pieces from their collection. (He won't share how old he is, but appears to be in his 40s.) It's constantly tweaked to feel current – there are fewer diamond-encrusted watches these days, Appiah says, and more in rose gold – and skews towards male clients, although there's a constant flow of women thanks, in large part, to the jewellery he designs. Those pieces are mostly conversation starters, such as diamond pendants in the shape of Jamaica or South Africa, and rings adorned with spheres in enamel or yellow gold.

Appiah's love of accessories began as a young child: by the time he was seven years old, he was designated by his mother to choose which bold cocktail rings and earrings she would wear to parties and special occasions. "I had full control over the jewellery bag; that was like my little job," he says. She would take him along when she was jewellery shopping as well, on trips to Hatton Garden, charity shops and antique stores, which began to give Appiah a sense of how to find treasures and procure them at a good price.

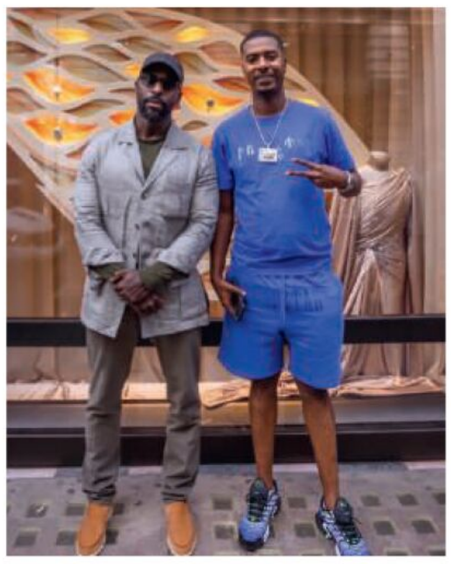
His love of watches began early too: as he was turning 19, one of his brothers lent him money to buy a Rolex Datejust with a champagne dial and diamonds. Appiah and his siblings veered towards accessories that were a bit more refined than what their friends were wearing. As Appiah put it, "We never went for the tacky stuff – we were quite prim and proper. We always wanted to look different. If everyone was going left, we would definitely go right."

Around that time, living at home and studying at Middlesex University, he began working in the music industry, first in marketing, then managing an artist, Sway, with whom he co-founded

"I've got [everyone] from musical artists to bankers to multibillionaires – it's literally all over the place."



Left: **Appiah's own pieces include a white-gold number ten made for footballer André Ayew, and a pendant bearing the initials of boxer Canelo Álvarez, both set with colourless VVS diamonds.** Below: **Appiah pictured with customers Nines, Anthony Joshua, and Damson Idris.**



record label Dcypha Productions. (Although Appiah focused on the business side, his rapping is featured on Sway's 2007 track "Move Back".) He became known in the music scene as well as in his Tottenham community for a confident sense of style; his jewellery, some self-designed, was sometimes sold to friends who spotted him wearing it. "They just thought, If Chiefer's got it, it's cool – we need it," he says.

Eventually, the appeal of the music industry began to wane and, about 15 years ago, he decided to focus full-time on jewellery and watches, which he'd also begun to re-sell here and there. To teach himself about the business, he began spending more and more time in Hatton Garden, at one point going there every day, as if he was attending school lessons. The goal was to learn the guarded ways of professional jewellery and watch dealing. As he recalls, "All this information is being gate-kept and I'm like, 'I need to crack it, so what am I going to do?' I said, 'OK, I'm going to befriend these people,'" he says.

He earned the trust of many dealers and was invited to begin selling at a watch boutique in Hatton Garden. In the area's historically white retail environment, Appiah helped put customers who came from similar backgrounds to his at ease.

"They trusted me. They were comfortable with me," he explains. "They wouldn't walk in the store and get the looks and whatnot, because obviously I'm selling to people that are literally in my phone book, people who are exactly like me – Black boys or Black ladies. They weren't being judged and they were getting that service, and that translates to me now."

He gradually built up a substantial clientele and moved his business to a discreet showroom in Mayfair and then, in July 2023, to his current location. His solid customer base for watches is rooted with the best resale dealers, who have confidence in the quality, condition and authenticity of what's on offer.

"In the world of pre-owned, it's incredibly important to trust the person that you're buying the watch from," says Hamish Robertson, co-founder of The Watch Collectors' Club, a London-based horology group. "It's time and experience with a person or business or brand, then a relationship is built. Dealers who do well build that trust with their clients."

Appiah's zeal for his business is also hard to resist, and a bit contagious. "The guy is electric," says Ash Kohli, who works in real estate and has purchased several watches from him, including a Ulysse Nardin San Marco Hourstriker and a limited-edition rose-gold Franck Muller Endurance 24 Chronograph. "You can't find anybody else with the same amount of passion that Chiefer has."

Some of that fervour, Appiah explains, has come from challenges: when he was around 30, he woke up one morning without the sight in his right eye, which turned out to be caused by sickle cell anaemia, a blood disorder. After seven operations, he still can't see with that eye. "It was very unfortunate, but [also] very fortunate because it made me put things into a different perspective," he says. "I thought, I'm not going to waste my time. And I'm telling you, that energy is in what you get in the shop."

This year, he's set himself another goal: to open his own jewellery academy, where about 20 students a year will learn everything from diamond setting to social media marketing. (Appiah's Instagram account, @chieferdcypha, is the way many first-time customers hear about his business.) Many of the pupils will come from backgrounds that are similar to his.

"I truly believe there's talent that's not coming through because there's no access," he says. "I don't want them to go through what I went through." ●

RACHEL FELDER IS A JOURNALIST BASED IN NEW YORK.

The 2024 GQ Watches Encyclopaedia

Whether you're an obsessive collector, making your first major purchase, or a certified resale fiend looking for the next hype piece, this year's starriest releases deliver. We spoke to the world's horological heroes to find out how.

By Vivian Morelli
Photographs by Baker & Evans

↙ANOMA A1
Not many watch brands can say they were inspired by a '50s table design – Charlotte Perriand's to be specific – which is why British newbie Anoma feels so unique. Its debut is the buzzy Anoma A1, which Masaharu Wada of Tokyo Watch Club and Hodinkee Japan reckons "signals a fresh direction for microbrands in 2024, by reflecting the spirit of '50s shape watches". We're inclined to agree. **£1,560.**

↓ALPINA ALPINER EXTREME AUTOMATIC
"Alpina specialises in something we could all do with more of these days – sturdy, well-designed mechanical and quartz watches at very approachable prices," says The 1916 Company's Jack Forster. The textured dial, sporty design and price of this Alpiner Extreme Automatic is indicative of what you can expect from a brand deserving of more hype. **£1,595.**

↑A LANGE & SÖHNE DATOGRAPH UP/DOWN
"The German brand is deeply loyal to the pursuit of revolutionary precision watchmaking, prone to playing around with asymmetric layouts, unique complications, dial materials, finishing techniques, and even semi-transparent dials where inside functions glow in the dark," says luxury watch dealer Zoë Abelson. The Datograph Up/Down looks fresh, and this platinum version – with a black dial made from silver – epitomises everything A Lange & Söhne is about. **Price upon request.**

↘AUDEMARS PIGUET ROYAL OAK 23MM
"AP is a true trailblazer in not only watchmaking but more importantly, the lifestyle surrounding watches," says JJ Owens of Daily Grail. In the past few decades, no one has flown the flag for watches in the cultural, celeb-filled zeitgeist higher. The new Mini Royal Oaks – 23mm in yellow, pink, or white gold – dominated social media, and look even better stacked on a wrist, as Serena Williams demonstrated at this year's Espy Awards. **£29,900.**

↙AVI-8 BELL X-1 MACHBUSTER AUTOMATIC
If a quartz pilot's watch for under £500 is what you're looking for, the new Bell X-1 Machbuster Automatic should float your boat. "A relative newcomer to the watch world, AVI-8's core theme is military aviation, with each collection representing a specific military aircraft or an untold story of the heroic pilot that flew it," says watch writer Justin Hast. **£275.**

→BALL WATCH COMPANY ENGINEER HYDROCARBON EOD
Any watch capable of withstanding a 10 metre free fall we're filing under robust rather than unassuming, and Ball Watch Company's Engineer Hydrocarbon EOD will be totally cool with that. After all, the Swiss brand's signature is sturdy, well-designed timepieces. This piece is Ball's most shock-resistant mechanical watch – in case you want to put it to the test. **£2,760.**

↓BELL & ROSS BR-03 HORIZON
Come to Bell & Ross for the design and stay for the community, say Cyril and Nicolas from the BR Gang, a French-speaking community close to the brand and its founders. "Bell & Ross draws inspiration from its community and wants to spend time with it by organising events that showcase new products and share moments of conviviality," they tell me. One thing's for sure – the crew will dig the new aviation-inspired jet-black ceramic BR-03 Horizon. Half black, half sky-blue, it turns out an attitude indicator looks quite good as a dial. **£3,990.**

→BAMFORD LONDON X POPEYE GMT
"George Bamford has a unique connection to Switzerland's big players and could yet help put British watch companies properly on the international map," says watch writer Robin Swithinbank. Having made a name for himself as a tasteful amper-upper of dials, under Bamford London he's now built a solid brand that trades in fun, decent, and reasonably priced watches. Bamford's GMT model is his biggest hit thanks to his affinity for limited-edition collabs with Popeye and Snoopy. **£1,700.**

↑BAUME & MERCIER RIVIERA 10764 AUTOMATIC
Not all watches with geometric bezels and integrated bracelets have long waiting lists. This Riviera 10764 Automatic model from one of the most under-the-radar Swiss brands gives off major AP vibes – but at a fraction of the cost. Super wearable, high-quality timepieces are Baume & Mercier's bread and butter, but dials such as this terracotta one show they're ready for grail status. **£2,675.**

↘BIVER CARILLON TOURBILLON
"Sadly there's very little romanticism left in the watch industry – profits over poetry is the general ethos – but at Biver, passion is a priority. This indie masterfully balances modernity with the utmost respect for the past," says Owens. With a watchmaking godfather at the helm (Jean-Claude Biver), it's not that surprising. Say hi to the Carillon Tourbillon – with a dial made of silvered obsidian, it looks like a piece of art. **£612,000.**

↑BLANCPAIN AIR COMMAND
"Blancpain's strength is its legacy, which stretches back to 1735. Over the years, it has introduced timepieces such as 1953's precedent-setting Fifty Fathoms – still a stellar diving watch – as well as women's pieces such as the Rolls and Ladybird," says watch journalist Rachel Felder. Its Air Command collection doesn't get the buzz it deserves, so here's us waving our hands around about it – especially the new slimmer version, with a featherlight titanium case. **From £19,900.**

→BOSS CHRONOGRAPH
Suits and fragrance, right? That's what you think of when you see the name Hugo Boss. But the German tailor also cuts a decent timepiece, including this gold link-bracelet number. Three hands on a textured dial and a bit of lume – the sleek look is very much Boss' wheelhouse and is always a winner. **£300.**

→BREITLING SUPEROCEAN AUTOMATIC
"In 2017, under the leadership of CEO Georges Kern, Breitling's once-complex collection was streamlined into three core collections: Air, Land, and Sea. This shift allowed it to expand beyond its aviation-focused identity, building a stronger presence in other domains," says Wada. Like its diving watches, this rainbow-hued Superocean Automatic 42mm offers something very different to its Navitimer and Chronomat models. **£4,250.**

↙BREMONT SUPERMARINE 300M DATE
"With its British military connections and celebrity tie-ins, Bremont is seen by many as a brand that exudes British coolness," says collector Neil Paul. With the brand having recently undergone a major makeover under Davide Cerrato, now seems as good a time as any to make Cool Britannia your entire personality. This new-look Supermarine diver is thinner but stronger, made with the same 904L steel used by Rolex. **£3,600.**

↓BRISTON STREAMLINER URBAN CHRONO
This independent French brand was founded by Brice Jaunet, ex-Zenith and Cartier. Despite being Paris-based, the designs have a preppy British spirit to them – tailor-made for a budget-conscious enthusiast who likes Panerai-esque chunky cases. As well as tapping in to 2024's green dial craze, how's the tortoiseshell acetate lining on the case of this loud number? **£535.**

↓BULOVA SUPER SEVILLE
"Bulova is one of the very few remaining great American watch brands still headquartered in the US – in the Empire State Building, as it happens," says Forster. The Super Seville is a worthy ambassador, giving off some serious '70s vibes with a retro TV-shaped case and slim silhouette. It's nice to know real quality still exists for three figures. **£480.**

→BVLGARI ALUMINIUM X FENDER
If anyone is guilty of pushing the envelope when it comes to design and performance, it's Bvlgari – after all, its Octo Finissimo is as thin as a 5p coin and seized the title of thinnest ever watch back from Richard Mille earlier this year. But as much as we dig its solo work, the brand's latest GMT piece, a killer collaboration with Fender, adds new meaning to rocking a watch, especially when you cop an eyeful of the Strat-style sunburst dial. **£3,970.**

↓BREGUET TYPE XX
The OG of wristwatches. "Breguet exudes a sophisticated vibe that appeals to watch collectors who are enthusiasts for horological inventions, historic designs with modern twists," says collector Roy Chan, "but above all, the art of precise timekeeping." There is no better example of such than the reimagined Type XX, which just bagged itself a new rose-gold ceramic Flyback Chronograph. Never has a date window looked so good snuggled up between four and five o'clock. **£35,500.**

↓CARL F BUCHERER HERITAGE WORLDTIMER
What began in 1888 as a specialist store in Lucerne, Switzerland, is today the biggest watch and jewellery retailer in the world. Carl F Bucherer, Bucherer's own brand, has had a lot of positive chatter lately, and that's set to continue thanks to the Heritage Worldtimer in steel. It went digging into its '50s archives and came out with a modern interpretation of one of the first watches to integrate a second time zone. **£6,600.**

↓CASIO X APC
Not only is Casio a classic, it's a celeb favourite too – just ask Tyler, the Creator. "Fifty years on, its iconic shapes and designs are still everywhere on the wrist of movie and pop icons," says collector Andy McIntyre. "Casio culture sends an image and sets a scene." Its latest lo-fi winner comes with French fashion house APC. It's a reimagining of what retro-looking is, giving sci-fi and old money, all at once. **£190.**

↑DIOR CHIFFRE ROUGE
If the name makes you think this will be a fashion watch, think again. Dior's Chiffre Rouge watch movement is provided by La Fabrique Du Temps, the Swiss watchmaking arm of Louis Vuitton. The model was initially launched in 2004, but feels like it's only now in its prime; after releasing a handful of fresh and improved versions earlier in the year, this dressed-up number has just dropped. With touches of rose gold, the obvious star is that cannage pattern on the grey dial. **£9,700.**

←CARTIER TANK AMÉRICAINE
"Cartier will always be my first love," says Brynn Wallner, founder of Dimepiece. "On my 31st birthday I visited the Cartier Mansion on Fifth Avenue and splurged on a small, steel Tank Française. It's still the watch I wear the most because of how versatile and effortlessly elegant it is – which is the essence of Cartier's universal appeal." Et voilà, the new Tank Américaine collection only adds to that halo. A more elegant, elongated gold case we never did see. **£16,000.**

↖CERTINA DS-7 AUTO CHRONO
You might associate Certina with motorsports, but the entry-level Swiss brand has been big into the emerging padel scene since 2021 – way ahead of the curve. Its sporty-looking 42mm DS-7 Auto Chrono is the first watch to reflect that, with a dial pattern that presents as similar to a padel net. And a new silicon balance spring helps ensure its automatic movement ticks along smoothly while you're battling it out on court. **£1,640.**

↑CHANEL PREMIÈRE SOUND
"Chanel is more than a maker of 'fashion' watches. It's owned the La Chaux-de-Fonds manufacture since 1993, where it not only makes ceramic components but also complicated movements," says JX Su, founder of SJX Watches. As well as owning a stake in Kenissi (the movement factory controlled by Tudor), it also recently invested in indie MB&F, just before unveiling the Première Sound – a touch of whimsical brilliance. Yes, it's a long sautoir necklace featuring a watch and wired headphones. **£12,600.**

→CHOPARD LUC XPS
Given the wealth of green faces that dropped in 2024, we've been spoiled for envy-inducing investment pieces. One standout: this LUC XPS with a forest-green sector-style dial. "Twenty-seven years after Karl-Friedrich Scheufele started his in-house manufacture Chopard LUC, Chopard is finally getting recognised as one of the greatest creators of classic elegant watches," says Wei Koh of Revolution Watch. **£10,700.**

→CHRISTOPHER WARD C1 MOONPHASE
Moonphase complications rarely come cheap, but British Christopher Ward has changed that thanks to its new C1, which boasts a show-stealing lumed-up moon, shimmering dial and, at 37mm, is super wearable. "Christopher Ward has an established reputation for offering luxury watches at accessible price points for the vast majority of collectors and consumers," Paul adds. **£1,995.**

↗CITIZEN RED ARROW
Need a trusty grab-and-go? Citizen is the answer. The Japanese brand has produced more than 10,000 different models over its 100-year history, so it's safe to say that it knows how to produce a crowd-pleaser. The Red Arrows model is exactly that – it looks good, will last, and requires minimal maintenance, no aerobatics required. **£895.**

→DOXA SUB 300T
"Doxa has a unique position within the industry as it's still considered a boutique brand under the multi-generational Jenny watchmaking family, while also specialising in heritage diving sports watches," explains Matthew Catellier of WatchReviewBlog. "While this limits a broader reach within the market, it allows Doxa to create outstanding watches which dominate that specific niche." So if divers are your thing, you're in for a treat. The latest Sea Emerald Sub 300T paints the picture for you. **£2,290.**

↗FARER FIELD II
British micro-brand Farer sets itself apart with bold colours and contrasting textures, a very welcome thing in today's market. Its timepieces offer a fresh take on the tool watch genre, and all are built for adventure. The Field II is a great-value watch – there's a but, though. Since each model is produced in limited numbers, they tend to sell out as fast as Oasis tickets. **£1,150.**

↓FEARS BRUNSWICK
Few watch flexes rival a bit of iridescence on the wrist. If that sentiment resonates strongly, the new Fears Brunswick 38 is likely to sit nicely with you. We're talking about a pink mother of pearl dial,complemented by black-gold hands and appliqués. See what we mean? Still family-run by the sixth-gen director, we suggest a trip down to its Bristol flagship store to see for yourself. **£3,650.**

←FOSSIL ES5340
"I'm living for the watch jewellery trend," says Charity Mhende of Instagram's @pulseonthewrist. "Fossil's got great pieces, from chunky rings to sentimental necklaces, and it's all about effortlessly adding a watch to your look with a pop of colour." Come for the Tank-like shape and psychedelic swirl, stay for the matte black finish. **£220.**

↑FP JOURNE ÉLÉGANTE GINO'S DREAM
Already the subject of a cult following, FP Journe's street cred was elevated even further when watch god John Mayer was seen rocking an Élégante on stage. This year marked the model's 10th anniversary so the powers that be decided to throw a party – in the tonneau-esque shape of a rainbow-set dream. Unlike most multicoloured bezels, this one is made of synthetic ceramic stones (not diamonds or gems). Typical of Journe to do things its own way. **£37,700.**

→FURLAN MARRI DISCO HAVANA
A Swiss indie out to make people smile, Furlan Marri is a welcome ball of energy. The dial on this Disco Havana resembles two disco balls – one for the hours and minutes, the smaller for seconds. Sounds fun, is fun. "Their attractive designs at affordable prices should not be missed in your collection," says collector Danar Widanarto. **£2,690.**

←FREDERIQUE CONSTANT CLASSIC MOONPHASE DATE MALACHITE LIMITED EDITION
"Frederique Constant takes its business as a true manufacture seriously, developing 30 calibres in just 20 years, and the finishing is also done very well," says Tokyo-based watch writer Naomi Maruyama. "It's a brand often overlooked for being so fairly priced." This limited edition is testament to all of this – name a better white-gold moonphase with such an exquisite malachite dial. **£27,295.**

↓GARMIN FENIX 8 PRO
Whether you're a couch-to-5K casual or ultra-endurance athlete, a dedicated fitness watch is a must for tracking progress (and posting smugly about your gains). Garmin's Fenix 8 Pro offers athlete-grade health-tracking features, GPS, a built-in flashlight, and solar charging, so it'll perform on even the most off-grid trails. **£870.**

↗GERALD CHARLES MAESTRO 4.0 DUCATI 30° ANNIVERSARIO 916
"Inspired by 17th-century Roman Baroque architecture, Gérald Genta chose his last gift to the world to be Gerald Charles, a collection of asymmetric masterpieces of shape and proportion," says NYC collector Christian Zeron. The latest piece is a collab with Ducati to celebrate 30 years of its 916 motorcycle and features all manner of firsts. The Maestro model we've grown fond of houses a skeleton jumping hours within a motorcycle wheel on the dial, with a Ducati-red strap for good measure. **£40,340.**

→GIRARD-PERREGAUX LAUREATO SAGE GREEN
"Girard-Perregaux is known for the Laureato sports watch as well as a bewildering array of haut-de-gamme complications," says watch specialist Tim Mosso, "the former being a design icon from the '70s heyday of integrated bracelet watches." To this day, it's just as aspirational, as you can see with this immeasurably elegant 38mm sage-green beauty. The clou-de-Paris finishing on the dial takes it to a new league. **£12,700.**

↘GRAND SEIKO ATERA VALLEY SPRING DRIVE

"I love where Grand Seiko is going; its trajectory has been remarkable," says Mark Cho, co-founder of menswear retailer The Armoury. It's down to the brand maintaining an extremely high standard of craftsmanship while greatly expanding its design aesthetic (hello sophisticated colour and texture in the dials) and movement technology (standouts are the dual impulse escapement and the spring drive). "I especially love that they have great watches at around 34 to 36mm in their collection as well, something quite rare in today's market." **£9,550.**

↘GUCCI G-FLAT
Gucci timepieces had always been considered fashion watches until former creative director Alessandro Michele changed that, by having it create its own mechanical movements and beefing up the offerings. Since Sabato de Sarno took over in 2023, the brand continues to move the dial on timepieces with the G-Flat, a sexy, Brutalist, '70s-inspired dress watch. **£2,270.**

↗JAEGER-LECOULTRE MASTER ULTRA THIN PERPETUAL CALENDAR
Firstly, it's not 'yaygrrr lay colter'; it's 'zhey-zher leh-koolt'. Or just JLC. Founded in 1833 in the serene Swiss Vallée de Joux (where it's still based today), the manufacture goes back a long way. That tradition comes through in pieces such as the Master Ultra Thin Perpetual Calendar. A blue dial and rose-gold case is already a winning combo, and it also has the perfect blend of genius watchmaking complications, thinness, and sophistication. **£37,300.**

↓GLASHÜTTE ORIGINAL SEVENTIES CHRONOGRAPH PANORAMA DATE
Were the '70s that swinging? We bet. At least we can channel the vibes with the latest Seventies Chronograph Panorama Date from German maker Glashütte. It comes with an automatic movement you can admire from the sapphire crystal caseback, and the case is all rounded corners – the pulsating icons of that era spring to mind. **£12,700.**

↓GRÖNEFELD 1969 DELTAWORKS
"Grönefeld is a difficult brand to discuss, because the greeting on its website is a declaration that it won't sell you a watch," says Mosso. Dutch watchmakers Tim and Bart Grönefeld have closed their order book while they work to clear a years-long backlog. With artisanal quality considered among the best in the industry, the brothers offer the kind of blinding decoration and miserly production expected of a god-tier boutique brand. **£42,500.**

← H MOSER & CIE x STUDIO UNDERDOG ENDEAVOUR PERPETUAL
Be it the Streamliner, Pioneer, or Endeavour collection, Cho looks forward to every H Moser release "because they always keep you guessing. Not only are all the watches designed thoughtfully and constructed well, the Meylan brothers are open-minded, dynamic and willing to work with others. As a result, H Moser has a broad and fascinating collection in-house, as well as endless interesting collaborations on the horizon." The latest with British indie Studio UnderdOg definitely sits in that bracket. A twin set of yellow-gold Endeavour Perpetual inspired by a passion fruit, anyone? **£59,000 for the pair.**

↓HAMILTON KHAKI AVIATION PILOT DAY DATE
"If you're just beginning your journey into mechanical watches, I recommend Hamilton, which embodies the adventurous spirit and timeless glamour of the big screen," says Charles Brunet of Mon Petit Horloger. "The value for money is just perfect." Released early this year, the Khaki Aviation Pilot Day Date is giving *Masters of the Air* – those oversized hands make it easy to read, whether you're in the cockpit, or on the commute. **£990.**

←GREUBEL FORSEY HAND MADE 1
"A beautiful conflict between art and invention – with no compromise on the finishing and its in-house complicated movements," says the Japanese collector known as Chronopeace of one of the industry's most beguiling brands. In a nutshell, that's Greubel Forsey. This model is made entirely by hand in its state-of-the-art Swiss workshops, and produced in only two or three pieces per year. **£847,850.**

→HUBLOT CLASSIC FUSION
Time+Tide's Andrew McUtchen reckons Swiss watches were getting stodgy and boring in the early '00s until Hublot came along. "It provided a much-needed injection of celebrity, boldness, and new materials that made it stand out enough to be the it-watch for more than a decade," he notes. That said, its success has always hinged on the understated and ever sleek Classic Fusion, with models ranging from 29mm to 45mm. This Essential Grey 42mm release in titanium doesn't scream Hublot, which for some might be its greatest appeal. **£7,300.**

→HERBELIN NEWPORT TITANIUM SKELETON
Inspired by pilot watches of the '60s, French brand Herbelin's Newport collection has been a bestseller for 35 years. Founded by Michel Herbelin and now helmed by his grandsons, the brand is a testament to how even a little *je ne sais quoi* can amp things up – see the Newport Titanium Skeleton, with its yellow rubber strap and carbon bezel. We think grandpa would approve. **£2,970.**

→HERMÈS ARCEAU DUC ATTELÉ
"Hear the name and you instantly have an image in your head: Birkins, butter-soft leather, rich people riding horses," says Wallner. "So even though Hermès is more a lifestyle brand than a watchmaker in the traditional sense, it has a built-in reputation that makes it all the easier to appreciate its horological segment." While the Cape Cod and H08 are collector classics, Hermès loves to play on its equestrian heritage, as demoed in the exquisite craftsmanship of this Arceau Duc Attelé. **Price upon request.**

→IWC PORTUGIESER YACHT CLUB MOON & TIDE
"IWC walks the tightrope between honouring watchmaking tradition and redefining itself for the modern era," says Ashken Longet of Watchonista. "For every pilot's watch keeping its heritage alive, [watches such as] 2024's Portugieser Eternal Calendar proves the brand's knack for innovation in today's luxury landscape." The new Portugieser Yacht Club Moon & Tide does both – it's a steel sports watch at heart that tells you the moon phases for the northern and southern hemispheres – the kind of thing that comes in handy at a yacht club. **£20,500.**

↓JACOB & CO BUGATTI TOURBILLON
The hypercar-inspired Bugatti Tourbillon embodies everything you'd expect from Jacob & Co's tie-in with the world's most exclusive car brand: spectacle and utmost precision. "Beyond the diamonds and idiosyncratic case-shapes is a brand that beats for those curious enough to suspend their disbelief and appreciate a futuristic approach to an age-old art form," says watch young gun Scarlett Baker. (Also, Jay-Z wore one.) **£331,750.**

←JUNGHANS FORM A CHRONOSCOPE
"Junghans inhabits a monochrome space and offers Teutonic formality with a crisp legibility," says watch writer Thor Svaboe, clearly partial to a bit of Bauhaus design in a dial. "I will admit to breaking out in a big grin seeing this all-black number on a lemon-fresh strap." Same. **£1,990.**

↓LAURENT FERRIER CLASSIC MOON
"The classic pebble-shaped case may be the most beautiful ever made. Big claim – but I'm prepared to defend it," says Hast. There's a very strong possibility that you won't stop staring at your wrist if LF's new Classic Moon is strapped to it. Along with that signature dial shape, a fantastical moonphase complication features on a Laurent Ferrier for the first time. **£74,400.**

↑LOUIS VUITTON ESCALE À ASNIÈRES POCKET WATCH
Now under the revamped leadership of creative director Pharrell Williams, LV has been making moves in the timepiece world recently, thanks largely to director of watches Jean Arnault and its Swiss La Fabrique du Temps manufacture. The refreshed Escale is one of the finest dress watches of the year, but this Escale à Asnières is a true one-of-one. **Price upon request.**

→MARLOE WATCH COMPANY MORAR 310
Whether you're wearing it for scuba or just by the pool at Palm Heights, no collection is complete without a serious dive watch. Indie Scottish brand Marloe ordinarily specialises in hand-wound watches, but this newly launched Morar 310 – the number refers to its depth rating – gets you a high-quality and cheerful yellow diver at a pretty attractive price. **£600.**

←MAURICE LACROIX AIKON AUTOMATIC
The bronze age may be over, but in watches it's just beginning. Since the 2016 launch of its successful Aikon, Maurice Lacroix has been getting flowers for its well-finished timepieces. So much so it has several fan clubs in Asia – which is when you know you've made it. The deep hue of this bronze limited edition is reminiscent of the '90s, and based on the brand's own Calypso model from that era. **£2,400.**

↑MB&F HM8 MARK 2
"If you see an MB&F in the wild, the person wearing it is not your average watch collector; he or she is much cooler," says Abelson. "With a futuristic style, the brand pushes boundaries in exciting ways, and the man behind it all is Maximilian Büsser." Pick up the HM8 Mark 2 and you'll be dazed, even confused, by how it works – which is exactly the sort of reaction that pleases Büsser most. **£72,600.**

→MONDAINE NEO
If you've done much travelling in Switzerland, you'll recognise this dial design – Mondaine is the official station clock maker of Swiss Railways. Train enthusiasts and watch collectors alike will appreciate the reverse-panda look of the Neo model, equipped with a vegan strap. Reliable, neutral... It's extremely Swiss. **£440.**

→MONTBLANC TRADITION AUTOMATIC DATE
Maybe you're more familiar with the snow-capped pens and diaries, but Montblanc has been stepping up its watch game with accessible models such as the Iced Sea (or as its Gen Z fans online have dubbed it, the Ice Tea). The latest Tradition Automatic Date is a reminder Montblanc can still nail the classics. How? With gold-plated Roman numerals around a two-tone grey dial on an integrated bracelet, that's how. **£2,035.**

↑LONGINES SPIRIT FLYBACK
When you've been in the game since 1832, heritage isn't a problem – remaining relevant is. No such issue for Longines. Renowned for its first-class pilot watches, the brand has recently reissued its Spirit and Heritage collections to keep things fresh, including this steel/yellow-gold Flyback 42mm with automatic movement. The Zulu Spirit Time, first launched in 2022, proves the brand isn't shy about embracing a totally new perspective, either. **£5,900.**

↖MR JONES KHAOSIFY
British brand Mr Jones Watches only does playful wristwear, and we're totally fine with that. The Khaosify, designed exclusively by Brighton-based illustrator, artist, and muralist Mister Phil, could as easily hang from the walls of a contemporary gallery as from your wrist. To read the time, the wearer must focus on the white elements. So tell us, what's the time? **£225.**

↓NOMOS GLASHÜTTE AHOI NEOMATIK 38 DATE ATLANTIC
Nomos is a collector favourite that comes highly recommended by Philippe Dufour, the pope of watchmaking himself, and writer and collector Bill Adler explains why: "When I saw the Tangente in the store, it was the one – out of hundreds of other watches – that gave me that fun, tingling sensation you get when drinking Champagne." This Date Atlantic will likely give you the same buzz, alcohol-free. **£3,820.**

↓OMEGA SEAMASTER AQUA TERRA
"Neil Armstrong, 007, the Olympics, Elvis Presley, JFK, Stephen Hawking – the list goes on," says collector Andy Freedman of Omega's stature. "Every time I strap on an Omega watch, I feel a deep connection to the brand's rich cultural heritage." This demure Seamaster Aqua Terra will give its wearer some of Freedman's feels. With a new elevated black glossy dial, it's an ideal daily driver. **£6,200.**

↓PANERAI SUBMERSIBLE ELUX LAB-ID
"Panerai is renowned for large cases and crown guards. However, what makes the brand stand out from others is definitely the close-knit Paneristi community," says Paul Richardson of Instagram's @paneraipassione. The extra-chunky Submersible Elux Lab-ID is the community's newest member, with a six-barrel movement and light-but-hardy ceramic case. It also has a cool luminous party trick using electromechanical power, lighting up on demand to give your wrist a proper glow-up. **£75,800.**

↑NORQAIN NEVEREST GLACIER
"Having patronage from the all-powerful watch wizard JC Biver in their early days set expectations sky-high, and Norqain haven't disappointed," says Svaboe. "Mostly known for technically gifted carbon-fibre designs, the 40mm Neverest is a curated take on a timeless Swiss diver." Looking at that glacial dial, we agree. **£3,130.**

→ORIENT CLASSIC SUN & MOON
Low-key, reliable, and reasonably priced – maybe that piques your interest. You might also be surprised to learn Orient is a Japanese brand, now owned by the Seiko Group. Its Sun & Moon semi skeleton is just as its name states, featuring a sun and moon complication that lets you peek through to see its automatic movement. **£520.**

↑ORIS DIVERS DATE
Founded in 1904 as an industrial manufacturer of pocket watches, Oris added wristwatches to its lineup in the '20s. Thank goodness it did, because its dive models have amassed a cult following. Recently reborn as just Divers – dropping the Sixty-Five – the changes to them are incremental but big news for collectors. New retro typeface? Tick. More legible hour markers? Tick. Transparent caseback? Tick, tick, tick. **£2,100.**

↓PARMIGIANI FLEURIER TONDA PF SKELETON
The ornate yet wearable Tonda Skeleton is proof of just how much Parmigiani has stepped up its game. "Parmigiani is one of the most interesting brand evolutions in the industry. After his Bvlgari career, new CEO Guido Terreni's presence is a green flag, and the coexistence of the prominent and refined past results in a melting pot of beautiful techniques, impeccable restoration services and complications," says collector Andrea Casalegno. **£115,600.**

→PATEK PHILIPPE WORLD TIMER REF 5330G-001
"In watch collecting, all roads lead to Patek Philippe," says WatchTok king Mike Nouveau. "Some might start with Rolex, take a right turn at Lange, a couple of steps up to Journe... but in the end, everyone ends up at Patek Philippe." Mark Wahlberg has made such a journey, and was recently spotted casually flexing the new World Time With Date ref 5330G-001. Initially launched as a limited edition piece, now it's part of the regular collection – exactly how Patek rolls. **£65,600.**

↑PAULIN MODUL E AUTOMATIC
An indie based in Glasgow, Paulin is all about typography – numerals are the first thing it considers when creating a new watch. Its collections are inspired by art and architectural movements, and the Modul E Automatic is a perfect example: the bold colours, tonneau-shaped case, and mesh strap combine for a super graphic, ultra modern grail. **£900.**

↘PIAGET POLO SKELETON
"For discerning customers who are daring and want to be different, enjoy extravagance and indulge in the elegant way of life," says collector Robin Wong of Piaget, which boasts a diverse line – from opulent bejewelled watches to record-breaking ultra thin models. Always open to trying things, Piaget just added ceramic to its repertoire for the first time, providing a chic new spin on the Polo Skeleton. **£36,700.**

↑RADO CAPTAIN COOK HIGH-TECH CERAMIC SKELETON
The Captain Cook is undeniably this Swiss brand's most iconic model. Emerging in 1962, it became admired for its unique water-resistant capabilities. Rado is also known for being an early adapter of ceramic cases, so the High-Tech Skeleton plays to its strengths, keeping the vintage cachet with a lovely insight into the inner works. And that rose-gold PDV bezel pops nicely. **£4,150.**

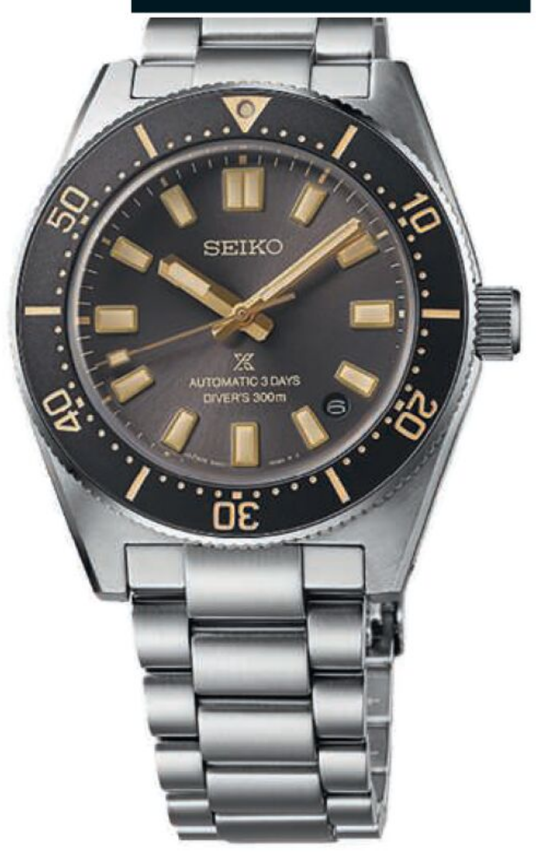
↓RAYMOND WEIL MILLESIME AUTOMATIC SMALL SECONDS
In the eyes of the GPHG (aka the Watch Oscars) committee, the Millesime Automatic Small Seconds – with its cool denim-blue dial – is the best watch under £2,000, beating out nominees from Seiko, Nomos, and Kurono Tokyo. If you haven't come across this indie Swiss gem, know this: it's all about the details. How'd you like those textured sector dials and that super soft calfskin strap? **£1,775.**

↑REMY COOLS TOURBILLON ATELIER
"While the rest of us were being rebellious teens and causing havoc on the playground, at age 11, Rémy Cools found his purpose after visiting a watch manufacturer," says Baker. After winning the prestigious FP Journe Young Talent Competition, Cools became an independent watchmaker in 2019 at age 22, producing this Tourbillon Atelier model. Only 12 are built per year, but they're worth the wait. **£132,400.**

↘RESSENCE TYPE 3 BB2
A slick, oil-filled watch is Ressence's forte. In its latest award-winning BB2, the watch inside the dial creates an unprecedented visual effect: the graphs look projected onto the top crystal, as if onto a screen – making it viewable from any angle, including at night. As you can probably tell, this Belgian brand thrives on creating innovative, unexpected pieces – all of which are adorned with a little hand logo, which is a nod to its home city of Antwerp. **£41,040.**

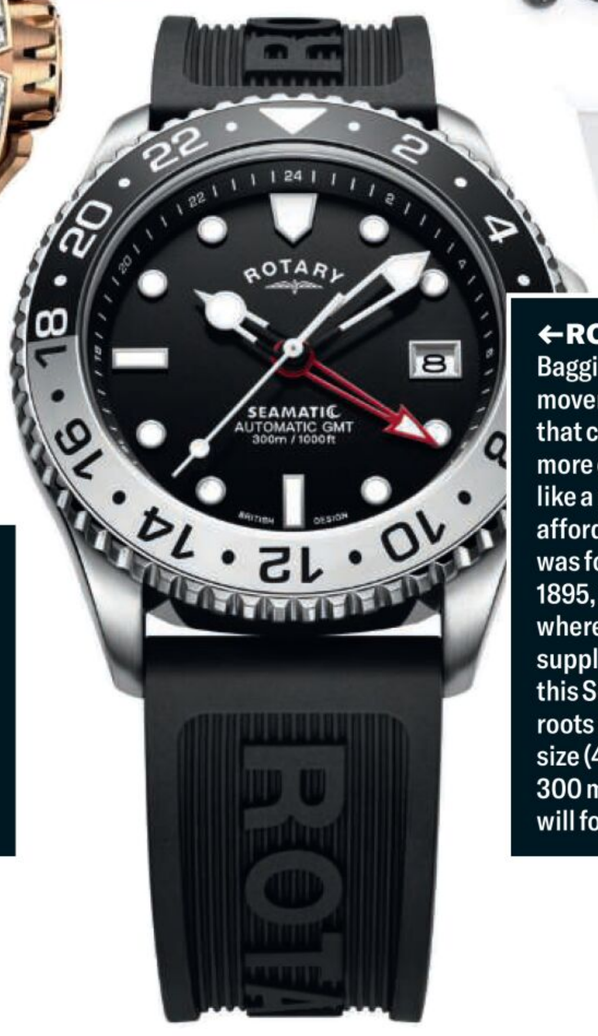
↓RICHARD MILLE RM 72-01
"Richard Mille is the embodiment of the idea that nothing is impossible. In two decades, it has skyrocketed to the top six in sales; it's become the benchmark for meticulous finishes, cutting-edge materials, and insane complications; and athletes at the top of their game love wearing them while competing," says Longet. It also knows how to dabble in history, as the Le Mans-inspired RM 72-01 can attest. **£317,270.**

↓SEIKO PROSPEX 1965 REVIVAL DIVER'S 3-DAY 300M
The Japanese watchmaker went digging into its archives to revive its very first diver watch from 1965. Here's the result: the new timepiece's design and dimensions are virtually identical to the original, while its specifications are thoroughly up to date. As always with Seiko, you can expect the utmost precision, and an attention to detail that belies its more affordable price tag. **£1,380.**



↑ROGER DUBUIS ORBIS IN MACHINA CENTRAL MONOTOURBILLON
Roger Dubuis tends to be associated with superlatives such as "the most bonkers complications", "most expensive", and even "most interesting press release". You get the vibe – admirers certainly do. Founded in 1995, it's a bit of a newcomer to the game, and this year has cooked up some truly freaky tourbillons – this one paved in rubies and diamonds is our favourite. **£310,000.**

←ROTARY SEAMATIC GMT
Bagging yourself an automatic movement GMT for under £300 that could be mistaken for a much more expensive watch seems like a no-brainer. Best known for affordable dress watches, Rotary was founded in Switzerland in 1895, then moved to London where it became one of the official suppliers for the British Army. So this Seamatic GMT is returning to its roots of sorts. A perfect dive watch size (42.5mm), it's water resistant to 300 metres, and that bezel combo will forever be a classic. **£300.**



↖ROLEX GMT-MASTER II
Not only is Rolex the largest manufacturer of fine timepieces in the world, it's also the most coveted – and, being real, copied. "Some of the most sought-after models command high prices and long wait lists," says Brendan Cunningham, a professor who has written a book on the Crown. Released earlier this year to much acclaim, the GMT-Master II in muted grey and black is absolutely peak Rolex. **£9,350.**

↗TAG HEUER MONACO PINK SKELETON
"Of all the major Swiss watch brands, none has a stronger connection to motorsports than Tag Heuer. The company's history includes a number of technically advanced high-precision, high-frequency timing devices and chronographs," says Forster. Tag is also partial to a pop of colour, with the bubblegum-pink accents of this Monaco model continuing on from last year's Barbie-fied Carrera hits. **£9,850.**

→TIFFANY AND CO UNION SQUARE
Tiffany-signed pieces for Rolex and Patek are currently all the rage, but the American icon synonymous with turquoise does some great releases of its own too. Jeremy Allen White and Jeff Goldblum would agree – both were spotted earlier this year wearing small Tiffany cocktail watches. As well as being rather dreamy, the latest Union Square model pays homage to its NYC roots with its skyscraper hands and clean lines. **£4,375.**

↓SKAGEN HOLST
With its minimalist, Scandi-chic vibes, Skagen's Holst model looks way more expensive than it is. The American brand (the designers are Danish, and it was named after a port town in Denmark) is known for putting out reliably stylish, minimal watches, and this one does the trick with its clean design and mesh bracelet. **£190.**

↙SPINNAKER FLEUSS 40 AUTOMATIC 145TH LIMITED EDITION
Spinnaker's Fleuss Automatic design takes inspiration from the golden age of steel dive watches, and the result is a versatile, vintage-looking number evocative of a Blancpain Fifty Fathoms - one you can comfortably wear to close a deal or catch a wave. **£540.**

↑SWATCH BREAKS OFF
"Swatch offers an entry point to this esoteric hobby to the masses, and they reinforce the idea that mighty things can come in small packages," says Hans Singer of The 1916 Company who, like many, first fell in love with Swatch via a Jellyfish that he still owns today. "There is a Swatch for every kind of collector and budding enthusiast." This Keith Haring-inspired piece from the Break Free collection feels destined to attract a new generation. **£115.**

→TATEOSSIAN ESPOSTO AUTOMATIC
You may already own Tateossian jewellery, but have you ever checked out its timepieces? They are designed to match its cuff link collections, using the same signature details. This Esposto Automatic has a Japanese movement and looks real chic on that croc-effect leather strap. **£640.**

↑THOMAS SABO AUTOMATIC
Thomas Sabo has always been a solid and affordable option, and now it's stepping up its game with a new line of automatic timepieces. To mark the big 4-0, the German watch and jewellery brand has released a lovely model with a mother-of-pearl dial that's outfitted with the reliable Miyota movement. **£715.**

→TUDOR BLACK BAY CHRONO BLUE
"Tudor is important for so many reasons – its rich heritage, its daring designs, the links with global military forces, and now its use of innovative materials and timekeeping," says Ross Povey of Tudor Collector. "As a consequence, it has a strong following in both vintage and modern collecting circles because there's something for everyone." Its Black Bay is a bit of an 'it-watch' these days, so naturally this Chrono Blue version has gone down a storm. That five-link stainless-steel bracelet alone is a good enough reason to get one. **£4,880.**

↓TIMEX Q TIMEX 1972 REISSUE
They're so ubiquitous, chances are you've owned a Timex before. For several decades, the brand has been a go-to for fun, affordable, and reliable timepieces. The Q Timex 1972 Reissue perfectly re-creates a model from over 50 years ago, finely balancing nostalgia with rather fresh contrasting gold and red tones. **£155.**

↑TISSOT PRX GRADIENT ICE BLUE
The PRX is the gift that keeps on giving. And giving. And giving. This bad boy – with an ice-cool gradient blue dial – is the latest version to scream about. "The PRX line capitalised early on the hype of integrated sports watches and brought in a lot of new watch fans to the hobby, especially a younger audience," says collector Ludwig Bolle Duvander. Judging by how viral every PRX release goes, he's spot on. **£640.**

↙ULYSSE NARDIN FREAK X
A new, so-called entry-level Freak just entered the chat and we're mad for it. "It is quite paradoxical. It's not often you find classic and freak under the same lexicon," says collector Yustaminhaj Krisanda. "But Ulysse Nardin offers a faceted catalogue, from historical Marine Chronometre references, to my personal favourite 7536 and the unmistakably freakish Freak reference 2505." **£30,810.**

↑UNIFORM WARES M37 PRECIDRIVE
Designed in London, made in Switzerland, Uniform Wares was founded by two product obsessives. It offers a killer combination of slimline cases, no-nonsense faces, and sleek straps. If you're into something minimalist and cool, try the M37 PreciDrive model. Nothing but three hands and clean lines is fine by us. **From £240.**

↖ZENITH DEFY EXTREME JUNGLE
"Blending heritage and modernity, Zenith's exceptional Defy collection exemplifies its uncompromising pursuit of horological excellence," says Watch Ho & Co's Jackie Ho. With its titanium case, sapphire dial, and sapphire crystal caseback, it's being called by Zenith "the toughest 1/100th of a second chronograph ever made". Ready for any jungle, urban or otherwise. **£24,200.**

↘URWERK EMC SR-71
"You will get to know hands are not the only way to tell time," says Chronopeace. "Urwerk has been making the dream 'Sci-Fi Time Machine' come true. No ébauche parts can make that happen. All from full scratch-up." Totally unique is exactly how to describe this EMC SR-71. A mechanical-electronic hybrid, it is without doubt one of the maddest releases of 2024. **£133,300.**

→VACHERON CONSTANTIN PATRIMONY MOONPHASE
"Although often overshadowed by other watch brands in the Holy Trinity, people are increasingly appreciating VC's understated craftsmanship and artistry," says Danny Shahid of Diamond Watches London. "My collection is forever changing but I will always retain my Mercator." If you're looking for a new grail to froth over, dip your toes in the VC world with this very wearable '50s-inspired Patrimony. **£47,600.**

↙VAN CLEEF & ARPELS LADY ARPELS JOUR NUIT
Get lost any time of the day in the celestial Lady Arpels Jour Nuit, illuminated by a yellow sapphires sun and starry sky. "Van Cleef & Arpels reflects style and poetic beauty ranging from minimalist elegance to exquisite craftsmanship," says writer Thomas Brechtel. The only question is whether to wear it or frame it. **£110,000.**

↙VERTEX M36
In 2016, Don Cochrane revived the Vertex brand. Founded a century earlier by his great grandfather, Claude Lyons, it had been dormant since falling by the wayside as one of many victims of the '70s Quartz Crisis. Proof it's back in business, this new bronze alloy M36 is a tribute to a 1944 model supplied to the British Forces on D-Day 80 years ago. **£2,450.**

→WILLIAM WOOD EXIT MAN
Some days call for something playful. In William Wood's newest Fire Exit release, the independent British brand makes clever use of the universally recognisable fire exit sign. The little green man comes to life on the front and back of the watch, carrying out a different action each day of the week, ranging from late to work, partying and hungover. Not too far from reality. **£1,495.**

↑VICTORINOX INOX SMALL
Yes, its Swiss Army knives are legendary, but don't underestimate the brand's watch range, which is just as sharp and versatile. The Inox lineup was actually launched to do for timepieces what its multitools did for knives, and it is one of the most indestructible models ever built. We love this 32mm, with a dial pattern mimicking the brand's knife handles. **£745.**

↑ZERO WEST M1 MOSQUITO
Only launched in 2018, Zero West is already amassing a loyal following thanks to its unique approach to commemorating great moments in British history. This 41mm M1 is a stainless-steel pilot watch, and then some. The case is cut from the crankshaft of a Mosquito fighter-bomber HX909 that took part in the raid on Amiens' prison during WWII. **£3,600.**

↗VANGUART ORB
The beauty of haute horology is you don't need hundreds of years of history to turn heads. If you're Vanguart, you only need seven. Made of titanium, the avant-garde Orb is a flying tourbillon that can alternate between a mechanical and automatic movement. Spend less time questioning how (via the crown) and more time marvelling at the orbital oscillating mass activated when it does so. **£133,000.**

How Cody Gakpo Scored His Rolex Collection

Goals aren't the Liverpool striker's only forte.

By **Mike Christensen**

"WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, THERE WAS A ROLEX dealer in Eindhoven, where I'm from, and I saw this two-tone rose gold and steel Datejust with chocolate dial and diamonds," recalls the Dutch international and Liverpool star Cody Gakpo. "That's the first watch where I thought, Oof, I really like that one."

Today, the winger's collection includes a rose gold Daytona he bought after scoring his first goal for the national team in 2021 and a platinum Daytona with meteorite dial that was a treat to himself after moving from PSV to Anfield in 2023. "When it's for something special, I engrave it with the date or the occasion," the 25-year-old says.

Gakpo relies on scrolling Instagram to feed his daily watch obsession. "Rolex is not too expensive, so it's accessible for almost everybody who wants to buy a watch, and every year it comes with nice new watches," he says. "IWC and Omega [have] nice watches, [as well as] more expensive ones like AP and Richard Mille. I follow them but don't necessarily buy them."

Gakpo's treasures also include a Rolex Cellini Moonphase in rose gold and a new green-dialled rose gold Vacheron Constantin Overseas Chronograph ("I like rose gold, to be fair"), which he bagged on a special orange rubber strap especially for Euro 2024. "That's the only watch I've worn for four months," he adds, all but confirming his love of a functional chrono – and for swapping out bracelets and straps.

But unlike scoring goals in front of the Kop, this is a hobby not an obsession – yet. "I like to know a lot about all the watches but that doesn't mean I want to buy them all – I just find it interesting." ●

Goal hound Cody Gakpo with his platinum Rolex Cosmograph Daytona and cockapoo Loulou.

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